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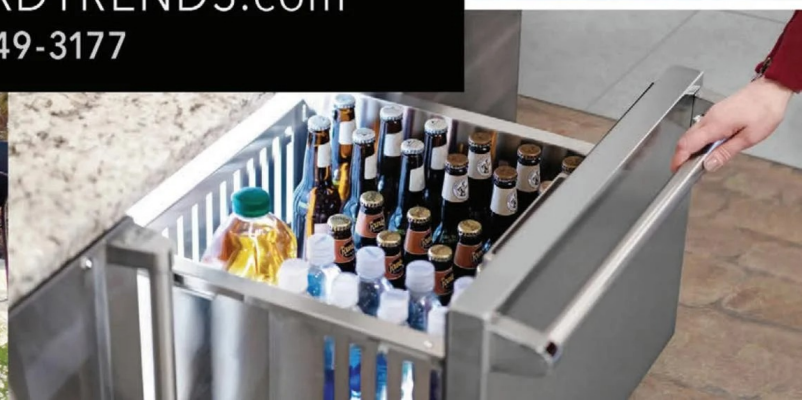

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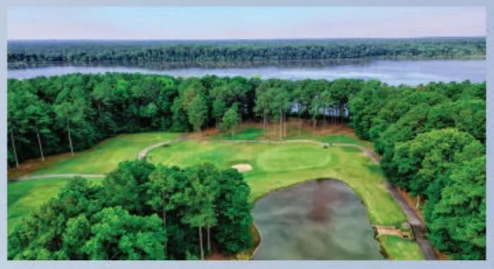

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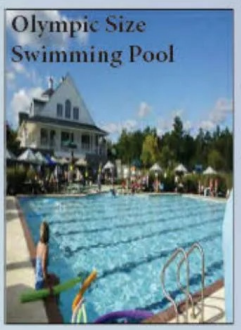

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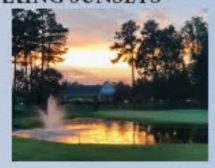

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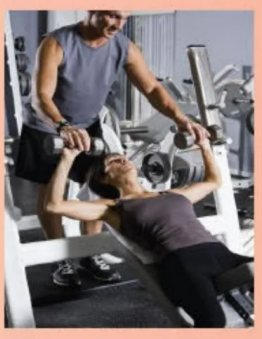

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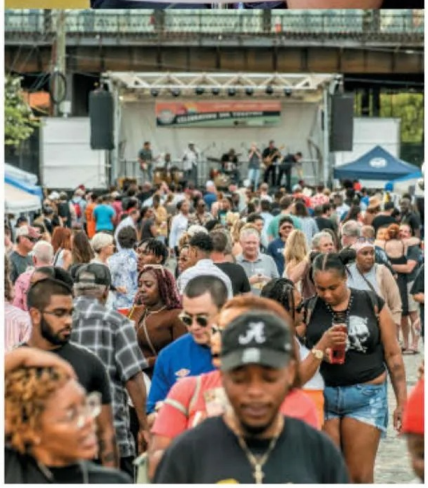

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ON THE COVER

Kickstarter CEO and Richmond native Everette Taylor
Photo by Zaid Hamid

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CORRECTIONS

Top Docs 2025 (April 2025) updates: In Dermatology, the correct phone number for Adam Martin is Martin Dermatology, 804-917-3376. In Pain Management, the correct address for Benjamin G. Seeman is Integrative Pain Specialists, 5901 W. Broad St., 804-249-8888. In Radiation Oncology, Drs. Chris Chipko and Lang Robertson Liebman are employed by Virginia Urology Radiation Oncology Associates.

FROM TOP: CARSON MCNAMARA; ZAID HAMID; DAVE PARRISH

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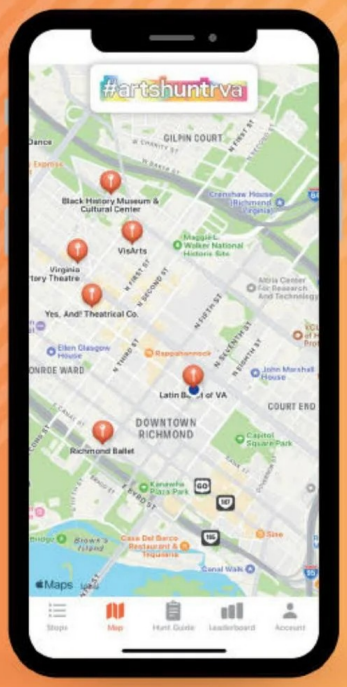

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from the
EDITOR
MINDY KINSEY

HOMETOWN HEROES

For a midsized city, Richmond has an outsized share of native sons and daughters making waves in the world. You probably heard about Mekhi Becton, the Highland Springs High graduate who played on the winning Philadelphia Eagles squad during this year's Super Bowl. And, judging by the speed at which her concerts are selling out, you're definitely familiar with Grammy Award-winning musician Lucy Dacus, who's from Mechanicsville. We could namedrop all day.

But one incredibly successful Richmonder has probably flown under your radar, despite winning awards and representing brands including General Motors, Amazon, American Express, Marriott and Disney. Now CEO of the online funding platform Kickstarter, Everette Taylor grew up in South Side Richmond, and started and sold his first business here before heading to the West Coast to launch his meteoric career. He's back in Richmond this month to speak at Virginia Commonwealth University's commencement on May 10 and will be an affiliate faculty member at VCU for the 2025-26 academic year. Check out his story on P. 70.

May is National Foster Care Month, and we're taking the opportunity to explore the foster system in Richmond and the commonwealth. As we discovered, the bad news is that the number of children in foster care in Virginia has hovered around 5,000 for a decade. The good news, though, is that there are many caring families, agencies and programs striving to help those kids grow up healthy and happy despite difficult beginnings. Learn about a few of them starting on P. 64.

On a lighter note, when we kicked off our summer entertainment guide last year, we ran into a fun problem: There are so many great things to do in Richmond, it was hard to cram it all into one issue. This year, we're spreading the coverage across two issues. We kick off with "Sounds of Summer," a 10-page guide to the seasonal music scene, packed with recs from the ultimate insiders: Richmond musicians. Representing a range of genres, they share their favorite venues for watching and performing, can't-miss festivals, and fellow performers they follow (P. 76). As a bonus, Harry Kollatz Jr. looks back at one of Richmond's early music festivals in Flashback (P. 32). We'll share more summer activity ideas next month.

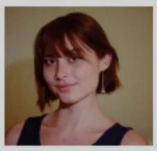
Also in this issue, we talk about speed cameras and Southside Speedway, a cocktail competition and a song contest, train travel and road trips, two comedies, a comedian, and much more. Enjoy!

CONTRIBUTORS

Christine Lu
Christine Lu currently works as director of communications for a local wealth management firm. A curious lifelong learner, her background includes creative directing, photography, freelance writing and teaching English. When she's not brainstorming ideas or moving projects along, Lu enjoys reading great books and exploring the outdoors with her family. Lu introduces readers to The Belvedere Series on P. 42.

Peter McElhinney
Peter McElhinney has covered the Richmond music scene for over 20 years, interviewing, writing about and photographing hundreds of local and international artists from a wide variety of genres. His other work experiences range from executive leadership and management consulting for technology firms to resort development in Central America. McElhinney contributed to the summer music preview (P. 76).

Zaid Hamid
Zaid Hamid is a portrait photographer based in Richmond. He is known for bold, stylish portraits and a creative approach that elevates brand identity, portraying clients as influential leaders and trendsetters. Hamid's modern, detailed work consistently pushes the boundaries of portrait photography, making a strong impact in both professional and creative circles. Hamid's photographs of Everette Taylor appear on the cover and in the feature on P. 70.



Hadley Chittum
Originally from Roanoke, Hadley Chittum is a documentary photographer, artist and part-time server whose work can be seen in publications including The Guardian, The New York Times, Teen Vogue and The Washington Post. They love to spend their days making glass art, watching "Real Housewives" and drinking Hugo Spritzes on their porch. Chittum photographed bookseller Mariela Gavino for Shop Talk (P. 51).

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Learn about common signs and symptoms

SYMPTOMS

- Blood in urine
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- Painful urination
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from the
PUBLISHER
RICHARD MALKMAN

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

Over the years, I have done a lot of stupid things as a homeowner, but it's not my fault. People who grow up around horses, like on a family farm, know how to ride; it's in their blood. You could say that owning a home was not in my blood. I didn't grow up with real estate. My family not only lived in a city, we lived in an apartment. When I bought a house surrounded by land instead of concrete, I was out of my element. I didn't know which end of a lawnmower to push, let alone how to use hedge clippers.

I blame my dad: He forgot to teach me the real workings of homeownership. The only thing I could remember him saying while I was growing up was that if a light bulb doesn't work, you need to change it to one that does. However, he didn't mention that light fixtures have limits on wattage, which explains why all those 100-watt light bulbs blew out in a 40-watt lamp.

I bought my first house when I was 25, thinking that all I had to do was live there and things would take care of themselves. I moved into the house in January, and the first thing I did was test the outside hose bibb and connect a garden hose, because that's where it belonged. My dad must have forgotten to tell me that you never connect a hose to the bibb in the winter, because the hose keeps the water from running out and the water could freeze in the pipe. It didn't run out, and it did freeze. When I turned the hose on in the spring, the inside pipe was cracked and the utility room flooded with water. I called my dad and told him what had happened. There was silence on the phone. That should have been my first clue.

Things didn't get better. When the weather warmed up, I was charged with planting flowers in what turned out to be very hard clay soil. Dad didn't mention that I should break up the clay or perhaps replace it with something that would allow plants to grow. The flowers didn't grow, and neither did anything else — the soil was rock solid. Another call to my dad; more silence. I realized that the flowers at my parents' place were fake because Dad didn't have a green thumb, either, and plastic tulips look good all year long.

> **Dad didn't have a green thumb, either, and plastic tulips look good all year long.**

After the flowers, I tried to grow grass — another subject my dad was silent on. Apparently, he had concrete instead of a lawn for a reason. I read the bags and packages at the big-box store and carted some home. Turns out you can't grow grass on a steep hill because the soil, seed and water always run off. That explains why there was plenty of grass growing through the asphalt cracks on my street.

I should have been proud of that. My dad was. R

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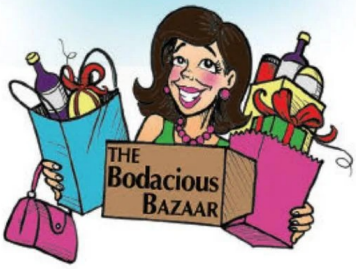

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LOCAL

Lin O'Neill of Save Southside Speedway

ASH DANIEL

New laws from the 2025 General Assembly P. 20

7,000 speeding tickets issued at one city school P. 24

A greener future for Mayo Island takes shape P. 26

Southside Speedway revs back up P. 28

Flashback: How RVA's music festivals took flight P. 32

Edited by MARK NEWTON

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GOVERNMENT

4 FOR 4

A look at passed and failed bills in the 2025 General Assembly *By Mark Newton*

Virginia's lawmakers passed nearly 2,000 pieces of legislation out of the over 3,500 considered in its 2025 session. And on April 2, the General Assembly reconvened to consider Gov. Glenn Youngkin's 157 vetoes and other proposed changes. Legislators also rejected most of Youngkin's budget amendments. All laws take effect July 1 unless otherwise noted, and all 100 seats of the House of Delegates are on the ballot this year. Here are some takeaways from this session's legislation action:

CRIME

- New felony crimes include mail theft, intimidation by using a swastika, sexual extortion and trespassing with a drone. Exhibition driving, which includes burnouts, doughnuts and drag racing, is now considered reckless driving.
- Manufacturers, sellers and dealers of substances laced with fentanyl that unintentionally cause a person to die can be found guilty of involuntary manslaughter.
- It's now a misdemeanor to abuse nitrous oxide or to sell inhalers or similar devices to those younger than 18.
- Procedures have been established for sanctioning nursing homes and to seize property taken through financial exploitation of vulnerable adults.

GOVERNMENT

- Owners of waterworks must report any critical equipment failure or malfunction, or contaminant release no more than two hours after discovery. A monthly operating report is also required.
- Voter registration deadlines have been softened to 10 days for primary and general elections (from 21) and special elections (from 13).
- Virginia can't put personal info about certain retired or former police officers online.
- Winners of $1 million or more in the Virginia Lottery won't automatically be identified. This Freedom of Information Act exemption previously applied to winners of at least $10 million.

SCHOOLS

- All school boards have to implement age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate policies that restrict cell phone use to the fullest extent possible during the instructional day.

- School divisions are required to inspect indoor air quality at each school at least every two years and make those reports public.
- Seven color additives will be banned from school meals starting July 1, 2027.
- When updating the Standards of Learning, the Virginia Board of Education must consider including media literacy and digital citizenship standards at each grade level.

FAILED BILLS

- Youngkin once again rejected a recreational cannabis market. However, a separate resolution establishes a joint commission to oversee the transition of the Commonwealth into a retail cannabis market.
- The minimum wage will stay at $12 an hour after a ramp-up to $15 was vetoed.
- Bills to remove tax exemptions for Confederate organizations, expand the definition of "American Indian" and establish a right to conception all died after Youngkin suggested amendments to them.
- A proposed Prescription Drug Affordability Board met its end thanks to a veto.

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SPORTS

NEW RAM IN TOWN

THE CLOSING OF THE COLLEGE BASKETBALL SEASON also meant the opening of head coaching jobs throughout the league. After falling in the first round of the NCAA Tournament to Brigham Young University, the VCU men's team lost its coach of two seasons, Ryan Odom, to the University of Virginia (which he notably defeated as head coach of UMBC in 2018's tournament). A few days later, the Rams hired Phil Martelli Jr. from Bryant University in Rhode Island. "I can tell you this: This day, this place, this university, these people, this is life-altering for me and my family," Martelli said during his introduction in March. —***Mark Newton***

VIBE CHECK

16

For the first time ever, the University of Richmond women's basketball team made **the Sweet 16** after beating Georgia Tech in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. They fell to top-seeded UCLA.

8

Richmond's rank in the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of **America's 2025 Allergy Capitals** report, which notes that last year the city saw 231 days that fell into the "high" or "very high" range for grass pollen. RVA ranked seventh in last year's report.

The Science Museum of Virginia's rank on Newsweek's list of **the best science museums in America,** which were selected by its panelists and contributors and voted on by readers.

1M

Visitors to Maymont in 2024. The milestone comes as the park prepares to celebrate its 100th anniversary as a public space in March 2026.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY VCU; ADOBE STOCK

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LAW ENFORCEMENT

TOO FAST, TOO FURIOUS

Cameras at McClenney ES catch thousands of speeding drivers

By Mark Newton

In just six months, drivers speeding past Frances W. McClenney Elementary School have racked up over 7,000 citations.

During school hours, the speed limit at the 3800 block of Chamberlayne Avenue slows from 35 to mph. Drivers trigger the two cameras there when going 11 mph or more over the limit. Following a grace period, fines were first mailed out Oct. 1, 2024, resulting in 4,137 citations in the last three months of that year alone. Only nearby Linwood Holton Elementary School caught more speeders in 2024; the speed cameras there, unlike those at McClenney, were active all year.

In January, Richmond Police Chief Rick Edwards said his department issued a total of 26,739 citations based on footage from 11 active locations in 2024 (now 13, as of April 2025), calling it "an incredible number." RPD has hired four part-time employees whose only job is to review footage collected by the automated traffic enforcement company Elovate, which operates the 26 cameras in the city. A full-time employee then finalizes the citations; in July, a new law will allow retired officers to perform this role.

"They do the best they can," Major Ronnie Armstead says. "That's a lot for that small group of people to handle. They're doing a tremendous job, given the manpower, but it's a lot."

Road safety has been a priority for the city, especially since establishing a Vision Zero plan in 2017 to eliminate traffic fatalities by 2030. The issue was thrust into the spotlight again when Mary Munford Elementary School Principal Gregory Muzik was hit by a car while biking on Patterson Avenue in March; he was still in intensive care as of press time.

"I'm hopeful that the expansion of the Vision Zero speed camera program will improve safety," City School Board member Ali Faruk, whose 3rd District includes McClenney, writes in an email. "Many of our schools are located in high-injury networks, and cars flying down these streets present a huge safety danger for students and families." He adds that there's a "dire need" to redesign the corridor to increase safety.

Armstead says that, because the speed camera program began just last year, progress will be slow, but he's hopeful that the fines — $50 for first violations and $100 for subsequent citations — will have an impact.

"I just want to see people slow down", he says, adding that drivers, cyclists and pedestrians all "need to be more vigilant and pay better attention."

STATS ON SPEEDING

Citations based on camera footage at McClenney Elementary School

Oct 1, 2024 - Dec 31, 2024:

4,137

CITATIONS MAILED

Jan 1, 2025 - March 31, 2025:

3,310*

CITATIONS MAILED

2025 BREAKDOWN

*preliminary March data

FROM TOP: JAY PAUL; KYLE TALLEY; DATA COURTESY RICHMOND POLICE DEPARTMENT

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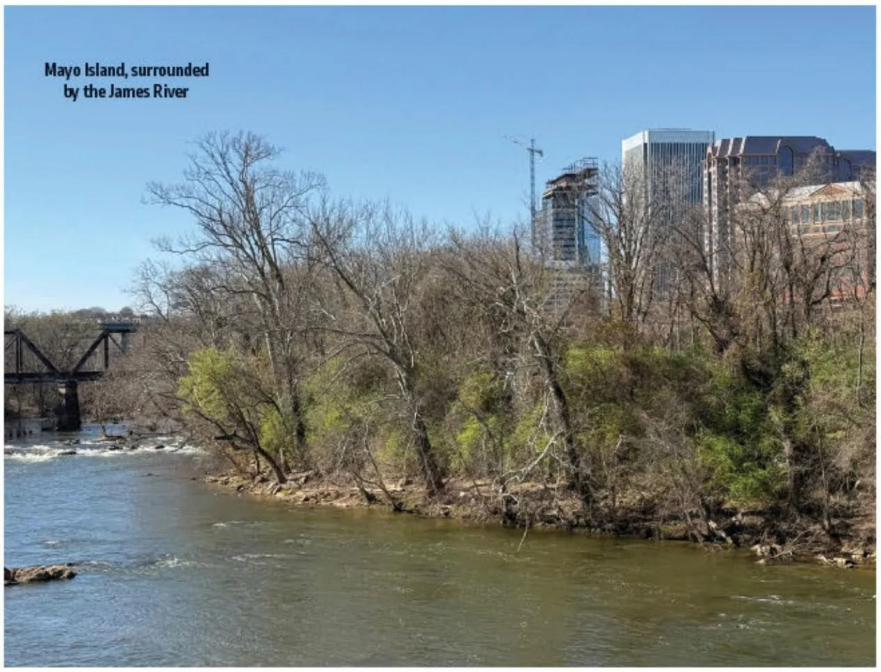
RECREATION

MAYO MAKEOVER

Nature takes over in developer's vision for an island park

By David Macaulay



Mayo Island, surrounded by the James River

Decayed, closed off and half-forgotten under one of Richmond's most dilapidated bridges, Mayo Island has waited decades for the kind of rehabilitation that city leaders are now discussing.

"This time next year, the whole island will be cleared of asphalt and the structures. Roughly 14 acres will be seeded with new plants," says Tyler Silvestro, a partner with the landscape firm Marvel, which has an office in the city. "You are going to start to see those plants emerge ... by the fall of 2026, you are going to see the first-year cycle of perennial meadow on Mayo Island."

After it bought the island's 15 acres under a conservation easement in 2024, the city hired Marvel to work on the reimagining of Belle Isle, the development of the new Dock Street Park and Mayo Island. On March 5, the city and Marvel hosted an open house to gather more public feedback on the Mayo plan, though Silvestro says the three projects should be viewed holistically.

"Mayo really has not had an ethos," Silvestro says. The island was used by Reynolds Metal Company, an aluminum foil manufacturer, in the early 20th century. "It was everything from a music venue, a baseball field and a boat club," he adds.

"Our primary focus is recreation and access to the river, and that's what we are hearing from the public. We want to connect people to the river via trails," says Nissa Richardson, deputy director of Richmond's Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities. She also wants to put the island on a map that connects it to the Richmond Slave Trail and the Virginia Capital Trail.

The city will receive multiple grants totaling $9 million from the Virginia Department of Recreation and Conservation conditioned on the restoration of the island by October 2026. The completed park will take longer. "We are not going to start with all the playgrounds, and all of the pavilions and restrooms," Silvestro says. Instead, the new plants will "tease out some of the heavy metals and toxins."

The future of the 112-year-old Mayo Bridge adds an element of unpredictability. The present bridge is structurally unsound, but its replacement will cost about $195 million, according to VPM News. The project is seeking $25 million in federal funding, with the rest of the money earmarked from state and local programs.

During the public meeting in March, attendees appeared keen on the idea of seeing a natural environment restored to Mayo Island involving trails and kayaking opportunities.

"I wish it would come faster. The No. 1 thing is accessibility with the bridge. When we ride our bikes across it, we take our lives in our hands. Hopefully, we'll get a nice bridge and this beautiful park," says Steve Marzolf of Swansboro. "The biggest thing is to make sure we preserve the natural environment. Anything will be an improvement." R

Councilmember Ellen Robertson stands next to a conceptual rendering of the park at a March 5 open house.

DAVID MACAULAY

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In March, Chesterfield County announced a 20-year deal to revive racing at Southside Speedway.

COMPETITIVE RACING INVESTMENTS/CHRISTOPHER KENDALL

SPORTS

GREEN FLAG

'Good, hard racing' is returning to Southside Speedway

By D. Hunter Reardon

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of the 2020 Southside Speedway season, the owners shuttered the doors in December of that year. Many people were certain the last laps had been run at the 0.333-mile track in Midlothian. Lin O'Neill was never one of them.

O'Neill, a race team owner at the track, launched Save Southside Speedway after the Chesterfield Economic Development Authority purchased the land in 2021 for $4.5 million and mulled various plans for the property, including some that did not involve stock car racing, which was first held at the site in 1959.

The organization collected signatures and lobbied Chesterfield County to find a solution that brought the track back online.

"I figured I'd get about 500 signatures," O'Neill says. "When it went to 21,000, I thought, 'This means something to a whole lot of people.'"

On March 11, county leaders announced a 20-year lease-to-purchase agreement for the speedway grounds with investor group Competitive Racing Investments, led by O'Neill and his former on-track rival Jeff Oakley.

In the lease terms, Competitive Racing Investments will pay $1 million for the first five years. From the sixth year on, the group will pay in monthly installments another $5.9 million over 20 years. O'Neill and Oakley intend to have the track operational as soon as possible: 2027 at the latest, with an eye on 2026.

"People were pushing me, saying, 'Just build a racetrack in Amelia [County] or something,'" O'Neill recalls. "I said, 'I'm not even interested.' This is where my heroes raced, this is where I raced and this is where I want my grandkids to race."

'A BIG FAMILY DEAL'

Bret Hamilton, who raced at Southside Speedway in the 1980s and 1990s, has been building race cars for most of his life. His company, Bret Hamilton Enterprises, builds late model, mini, modified and >

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< GREEN FLAG | CONT'D FROM P. 28

street stock cars, among others.

O'Neill says that all four of these classes of competition will return to Southside Speedway, as will grand stock and "U-Cars," shorthand for "U Can Afford to Race."

Hamilton built the first car that NASCAR Cup Series star and Chesterfield native Denny Hamlin raced at Southside Speedway, which was in the mini stock division.

"I'm there every week it's open," Hamilton says of the Speedway. "Since this announcement came out, I've had guys asking me about prices on new cars."

Hamilton adds that, though a lot has changed since his rookie year in 1985, the racing community is still close-knit.

"It's a lot of families involved, a lot of fathers and sons racing together," Hamilton says. "It's still a big family deal."

O'Neill points out that stock car racing is a competition for people of almost any age.

"We don't age out; we die out," O'Neill says. "There are guys [who are] 80 years old driving — or if they're done driving, they're out there tuning carburetors. And I plan to be one of them."

According to Hamilton, Friday night races are a highlight of the week for competitors and fans alike.

"Most of the people get along good. They look forward to seeing each other on Friday nights," Hamilton says. "It's a competition. You'll be out there beating and banging on each other during the race, but if someone needs something, you'll loan it to them."

Ricky Dennis, who built stock cars for NASCAR Winston Cup drivers in the sport's heyday and raced at Southside Speedway in the 1980s, says that "guys may race each other, wreck each other, want to fight after the race, then go get breakfast together at a diner the next morning."

MORE THAN RACING

Dennis, who ran a successful race car-building business for 19 years, says there was a hole in Southside Speedway's profit model before 2020: namely, the lack of other events.

Lin O'Neill led Save Southside Speedway and has a vision to keep stock car racing in Midlothian for good.

"It was open 21 days a year. Look, you've got concession stands, grandstands, bathrooms and parking lots. You need to use that thing," he says. "Hopefully, there's going to be a lot more events going on besides racing."

O'Neill can confirm: "I've got a list of 286 potential events," he says. "Everything from a car show to a carnival to a rodeo. You name it."

Though attendance and television ratings for the NASCAR Cup Series have dropped precipitously since peaking two decades ago, O'Neill says that fans still have an appetite for stock car racing. In fact, he notes, Southside Speedway can provide the atmosphere that made NASCAR great without the gimmickry that has marked its decline.

"No political mess, no mandatory caution flags to bunch the field up," O'Neill says. "Just good, hard racing."

To reel old-school race fans back in, the Cup Series has paid visits in recent years to classic short tracks like North Wilkesboro Speedway and Bowman Gray Stadium in North Carolina. Southside Speedway fell off the cup circuit in 1963.

While bringing back a cup race is probably not realistic in the short term, O'Neill has his sights set on attracting cup veterans like Dale Earnhardt Jr., who retired from the Cup Series in 2017 but frequently runs short track races in the Southeast on the CARS Late Model Stock tour.

Even after his retirement, Earnhardt is one of the biggest names in stock car racing. Driving the No. 8 he made famous 25 years ago, he can still pack a racetrack. To prepare Southside Speedway for an event of that caliber, Competitive Racing Investments has its work cut out for itself, including a total revamp of the grandstands.

"My goal is to seat 15,000 people," O'Neill says. "Bowman Gray seats 17,000, and we're in a much bigger area." The previous capacity was around 6,000.

Other projects O'Neill envisions include LED lighting around the racetrack and a program to get Chesterfield Career and Technical Center students working in race shops.

"This track is going to be such an asset to the county," he says. "People look at me like I'm crazy, but they looked at me when I was crazy when I said, 'Save Southside Speedway,' so I've got some goals." R

ASH DANIEL

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BY HARRY KOLLATZ JR.

FLASHBACK

The Festival of Festivals

Today's summers of memorable music began with wild and woolly iterations

Openers for Ray Charles at the 1989 Richmond International Festival of Music included Ghanian percussionist Okyerema Asante and Richmond's Plunky and Oneness.

COURTESY THE VALENTINE

What began as the Richmond International Festival of Music at twilight on Sunday, July 3, 1988 — announced by the pealing bells of the Carillon and answered by the city's churches on a stage installed amid the Byrd Park Fountain Lake for the Richmond Symphony and the United Nations Choir performing for an estimated audience of 20,000 — ended on the evening of Friday, July 15, 2004, as the Summer City Festival on Brown's Island with the renowned Richmond-based Plunky & Oneness opening for Earth, Wind & Fire before an audience of 6,000.

In between, the event created by Downtown Presents... (an antecedent of Venture Richmond) transformed into the Big Gig from 1990 to 2002. But because Milwaukee copyrighted the same title for its festival, Richmond's event was rebranded as the prosaic Summer City Festival.

Yet through name changes, sponsor roulette, shifting of music genres, the comingling of big name acts with locals known and not, and the downsizing of an event calendar from a three-week run to just five days, the series persisted by casting a massive bouquet of music across the city. Performances occurred in neighborhood parks and the formal settings of the Carpenter Center (now the Carpenter Theatre at the Dominion Energy Center) and the Mosque (renamed Altria Theater), in downtown's plazas, the gardens of The Valentine and Agecroft, stores, street corners and the City Hall Observation Deck. And most of it was free.

The whole concept came from the restless mind of Downtown Presents... dynamo Nina Abady. Christina Risatti then served as the organization's events coordinator. Soon, she'd have her hands full.

Abady eventually called on her friend Richard Koehler, chairman of Virginia Commonwealth University's music department.

"They hatched this idea together," Risatti recalls with some amusement. "Spoleto was definitely their model," referring to the annual springtime performing arts festival of Charleston, South Carolina, which presented an example for a destination event that stoked the creative imaginations of planners across the country, including that of Abady.

Risatti explains her own initial skepticism, saying that, unlike Richmond at the time, "downtown Charleston is small, walkable, nice for tourism."

The event, too, needed to avoid conflicting with June Jubilee and the Richmond Greek Festival. This placed it in hot and humid July, a time when many people preferred vacations to outdoor music events.

Regardless, with great ambition and a cumbersome, world-embracing name, the Richmond International Festival of Music launched around Fountain Lake. "Nina wanted this big, splashy thing" to inaugurate the event, Risatti says. This became literal.

Abady originally envisioned a floating stage, but it was impractical, even with the backing of Circuit City. She called Fred Brumbach of Backstage Inc. for assistance. Not knowing the depth of Fountain Lake, Brumbach jumped in to find that the water was waist-high and that the floor was level enough to install scaffolding to support a stage.

Former Richmond Symphony director Jacques Houtmann returned from France to conduct in shirtsleeves. He expressed some anxiety about the water stage, fearing he might fall off. Abady counseled him to remain standing.

A Dancing Waters mechanism spouted jets that pranced to the music of Shostakovich, Brahms and Borodin. ›

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< THE FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS | CONT'D FROM P. 32

The festival chorus with the United Nations Choir, dressed in the garb of their native lands, gave full-throated renditions of popular songs.

Mild evening weather drew crowds that clustered along the Downtown Expressway overpasses and filled the slopes surrounding the lake. Risatti remembers, "We didn't know if anybody would come. We didn't have any plans for parking. We hired three off-duty cops for security, but the third one never showed up because he got stuck in traffic."

The three weeks of music commenced, with afternoon and downtown lunchtime shows and evening performances.

Performances around town included multi-genre guitarist Chet Atkins; New Orleans jazz clarinetist Alvin Batiste and pianist Ellis Marsalis (only 300 attended their Carpenter Center date); pianist and composer Marvin Hamlisch, presenting the works of Scott Joplin; Rudolf Nureyev, performing with the Ballet Monde of Paris and the Festival Orchestra at the Mosque; the Theatre IV-produced "Ain't Misbehavin'" at The Empire (now Virginia Repertory Theatre's November Theatre); and a series of Bach chamber pieces, cantatas and organ recitals produced by downtown's Centenary United Methodist Church. The grand finale on Brown's Island provided the "ooh, ahh" factor with the Festival Orchestra and Chorus and fireworks.

Risatti chuckles about the condition of Brown's Island at the time. "Oh, it was a piece of dirt," she says. "There was nothing there; we had to bring power, water and everything else. Same thing with Fountain Lake."

The shows went on, with better parking arrangements and shuttles. Debates continued about the festival's scattershot offerings.

"Can the homefolk absorb 65 concerts in 16 days?" posed Richmond News Leader critic Francis Church in July 1989. He contrasted the citywide performances across the spectrum of rock, jazz, bluegrass, classical and folk by high-caliber players with audience numbers that were less than ideal. "The festival suffers from a serious identity crisis and needs more focus," Church observed.

A 54-member advisory and support group called the Keyboard was formed to assist with the artists and boost attendance.

And then there was the name.

"It was a mouthful," Risatti concurs. "And if you shorten it, it's RIFOM. What does that even mean?" With the help of the Martin Agency, it rebranded to the Big Gig.

The 1990 iteration proved to be a watershed for the series, with headliners including the velvet-voiced Lou Rawls; South African trumpeter and composer of the musical "Sarafina!" Hugh Masekela, supported by the Women of the Calabash; Willie Nelson with Shelby Lynne in a poorly designed concert at the Diamond (he gave the show's $5,052 proceeds to the Central Virginia Food Bank); gospel great Al Green; and jazz vocalist Cassandra Wilson.

Jazz pianist icon Marian McPartland performed through a cloudburst at Festival Park by the Coliseum. She invited the remaining audience members under the tent, and some spectators huddled beneath the piano. She played an extra half hour. The New Orleans Rebirth Brass Band led a parade down Monument Avenue.

In 1999, Tito Puente and his Latin Jazz Ensemble with the Richmond Symphony caused an overflow crowd of nearly 10,000 at Tredegar Iron Works. Many looked on from the grassy bluffs. Closer spectators, some waving Puerto Rican flags, danced in the rain.

Abady's 1993 passing put Risatti in charge of what became Citycelebrations. After 18 years with the organization and a decade of leadership, she concluded her tenure at the helm, telling the Richmond Free Press she wanted to go out "with a big round number."

Members of the numerous Richmond bands that participated in the festival over the years are still performing, from the Awareness Art Ensemble to Bio Ritmo, Roger Carroll to Janet Martin, David Esleck to the Ululating Mummies, the Oregon Hill Funk All-Stars to Ban Caribe, and many more.

The Big Gig, rather than ending, in a sense, multiplied, by laying the groundwork for the Richmond Folk Festival, the Jazz and Music Festival at Maymont and neighborhood concerts like Bellevue's Porchella.

As Nina Abady understood, music is a natural resource. R

COURTESY THE VALENTINE

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A&E

COURTESY SCIENCE MUSEUM OF VIRGINIA

Giant dinos at the Science Museum and more must-see events P. 38

The Belvedere Series' classic concerts gain momentum P. 42

The Ashland Song Competition beckons songwriters P. 44

ART 180's founding director, Marlene Paul, steps down P. 46

Edited by NICOLE COHEN

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Datebook

THEATER

FAMILY FEUDS

Enid Graham's "Smoke" is billed as a comedy of horrors. In the story, a couple from New York City rents a fancy mountaintop mansion for a family wedding, but their plans are thwarted by consumerism, distractions and gaslighting. What is truth? "Beliefs we used to take for granted ... are now shifting," Graham says. "Although we are looking at the same things, we don't seem to see the same world in front of us." The Cadence production, directed by Anna Senechal Johnson, is presented through June 7 at the Firehouse Theatre. Tickets are $35 to $40. *cadencetheatre.org —Julinda D. Lewis*

FESTIVAL

GREEK LIFE

With authentic Greek cuisine such as souvlaki, moussaka, spanakopita, baklava and loukoumades, the 47th annual Richmond Greek Festival brings a taste of the Mediterranean to the River City May 29-June 1. Traditional music fills the air, and costumed dancers perform throughout the event. A marketplace offers olive oil, jewelry and more. The celebration takes place at Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral from 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. May 29; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. May 30-31; and noon to 6 p.m. June 1. Admission is free, and the event runs rain or shine. *greekfestival.com* ***—Nati Feliciano-Soto***

THEATER

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

In "There Goes the Bride," on stage at Swift Creek Mill Theatre May 17-June 21, Tim Westerby shows up to his daughter's wedding toting a life-sized cutout of Polly Perkins, the trademark character for his latest ad campaign. After sustaining a bump on the head, Tim believes Polly has come alive — but only he can see her. The result, says Artistic Director Tom Width, is "another in a long line of Ray Cooney and John Chapman farces that have graced our stage with their silly plots and outrageous characters." Tickets are $44 to $49. *swiftcreekmill.com* ***—JL***

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY CADENCE THEATRE; COURTESY SWIFT CREEK MILL THEATRE; GETTY IMAGES

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EXHIBITION

WHEN LOOKS CAN THRILL

The Valentine's "FANCY: Costumes, Characters and the Richmond Masque," opening May 10 and running through Jan. 25, 2026, marks the first fashion and textiles exhibition at the museum since 2020. Nichol Gabor, the Nathalie L. Klaus Curator of Costume & Textiles, explains that the show presents the ways in which Richmonders through the years played dress-up. He notes that "fancy" is often associated with ostentatious formal wear, but "fancy dress is that transformative costume which we use for a temporary moment of play or frivolity." Presented in sections designated as Stage Performance, Festivals & Community, Fancy Dress Parties and Politic, nearly 40 mannequins will display varied creative garb. The exhibition also includes a GWAR mask, Pam Reynolds' Fabergé Ball outfit, a flowery "Midsommar"-inspired cone-shaped costume from the Carytown New Year's Day parade, and the newspaper-themed party clothes of David Tennant and Mary Harkness Bryan. Museum admission is $12 (free entry May 11 and every Thursday). *thevalentine.org*

—***Harry Kollatz Jr.***

FROM TOP: COURTESY THE VALENTINE; GETTY IMAGES

EXHIBITION

DINOS AMONG US

The Science Museum of Virginia's "Ultimate Dinosaurs" exhibition features life-sized models of Southern Hemisphere dinosaurs from the Mesozoic Era, hands-on activities (including touching real fossils) and an augmented reality experience. The exhibit is "a great example of how science is not static," says Timshel Purdum, the museum's deputy director of education. "What we know about dinosaurs has changed drastically in the short amount of time we've known they existed. "Ultimate Dinosaurs" runs May 31-Sept. 1. Tickets are $5, in addition to museum admission ($10 to $17.50). *smv.org* —***Melody Yuan***

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SPECIAL EVENTS

HONORING OUR HEROES

Every year, Memorial Day recognizes those who died in service to the nation. On and around May 26, several events in the region honor their sacrifices through musical performances, moments of remembrance, a parade and more.

MAY 24

The Richmond Symphony performs a free Big Tent concert at Chimborazo Park beginning at 6 p.m. Conductor Hae Lee leads the Memorial Day presentation featuring patriotic tunes and classical scores. *richmondsymphony.com*

MAY 24-26

In the days leading up to the Monday holiday, the public is invited to place American flags on graves at many national cemeteries in the Richmond region, including Cold Harbor, Fort Harrison, Glendale, Richmond and Seven Pines National Cemeteries. Some sites may also host special ceremonies. More information including times will be available closer to the dates. To find contact information and learn more about the individual cemeteries and grounds policies, visit *cem.va.gov.*

MAY 26

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services presents the Commonwealth's Memorial Day Ceremony at the Virginia War Memorial. The free event honors Virginia's fallen U.S. military service members. A ceremonial laying of wreaths will be held in the memorial's Shrine of Memory, and a post-ceremony concert features the Richmond Cadet Alumni Band and Friends. The remembrance begins at 11 a.m. at the site's E. Bruce Heilman Amphitheater. For individuals and organizations interested in laying a wreath, registration is required. A livestream will also be available at *facebook.com/virginiawarmemorial*. *vawarmemorial.org*

MAY 26

Henrico Recreation & Parks hosts the Sandston Memorial Day parade, embarking at 1 p.m. on Williamsburg Road where it intersects with Beulah Road and proceeding west to North Confederate Avenue. A block party follows from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Sandston Recreation Area featuring live music, activities and vendors. Admission is free. *henrico.gov*

—Compiled by Nicole Cohen

EVENT

THROWING DOWN

The eighth annual RVA Clay Tour invites the public to visit 21 ceramics studios throughout the Richmond area. The tour is a self-guided exploration that offers the opportunity to watch the artists at work and purchase pieces. "A lot of studios will have three, four, five and even six people being shown in one place, so you get to see a lot of variety," RVA Clay committee member Robin Cage says. The free event highlights the work of 60 artists and is held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. June 7 and noon to 4 p.m. June 8. For more information and a map of participating studios, visit *rvaclay.com.* — ***Mary Margaret Clouse***

STAND-UP

BAD GIRL OF COMEDY

The self-proclaimed, but oft repeated, "Original Bad Girl of Comedy," Luenell Campell has been making audiences laugh throughout her 30-year-plus mainstream comedic career. She's starred in films including "Borat," "School Dance," "That's My Boy," "Dolemite Is My Name" and many others. She has also appeared on numerous popular television shows, such as "Californication," "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," "The Last O.G." and "The Middle" and was a main guest on the docuseries "Phat Tuesdays." Luenell is currently a resident at Jimmy Kimmel's Comedy Club in Las Vegas, but she stops at Richmond's Funny Bone Comedy Club for four shows, May 9-10. Tickets are $42 to $52. *richmond.funnybone.com* — ***Gray Pershing***

FROM TOP: COURTESY RVA CLAY; STYLE LIKE U

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Happenings

MUSIC

5/13
After the release of his new album, "If It Takes Forever," Brett Dennen stops at Richmond Music Hall at 8 p.m. $25. *thebroadberry.com*

5/24
Synth-pop band Future Islands plays The National beginning at 8 p.m. $33.50. *thenationalva.com*

5/29
Celebrating their 30th anniversary, Ralph Stanley II & The Clinch Mountain Boys play The Broadberry. 8 p.m. $30. *thebroadberry.com*

STAGE

5/8-18
"Moving Art Two" is at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on select dates. The Richmond Ballet will perform "Slump," "Echoing Past" and a world premiere by Spanish ballet dancer and choreographer Yury Yanowsky. Tickets start at $25. *richmondballet.com*

5/9-11
Witness the feud, and all that jazz, between two murderesses at odds with one another during "Chicago: The Musical," presented by Broadway in Richmond. Tickets to the Altria Theater performances start at $53. *altriatheater.com*

5/15-31
Yes, And Theatrical Co. performs "Cry it Out," a comedy exploring new parenthood and female friendships, at Virginia Repertory Theatre's Theatre Gym. $40. *yesandrva.org*

6/3-8
Broadway in Richmond presents the Tony Award-winning musical comedy "Some Like It Hot" at the Altria Theater. Tickets start at $53. *altriatheater.com*

6/6
Ghosts of Edgar Allan Poe and the women who shaped the author's life (personified by actors) perform in "The Spyglass Seven," produced by the New York-based Evening Crane Theatre. The show is from 7 to 9 p.m. at The Poe Museum. $10. *poemuseum.org*

GALLERIES

5/9-17
Maggie L. Walker Governor's School's annual Senior Art Exhibit is displayed in Art Works' Jane Sandelin Gallery, offering the opportunity to view and purchase work from young artists. *artworksrva.com*

THROUGH 5/23
Christy Matson and Amanda Valdez showcase a collection of mixed media paintings during the "Milk Tide" exhibition at Reynolds Gallery's Main Street location. *reynoldsgallery.com*

THROUGH 5/31
The 1708 Gallery satellite exhibition "Do We Have the Courage?" showcases the contemporary works of Richmond artist Carl Patow at Linden Row Inn. *1708gallery.org*

THROUGH 6/6
Anne's Visual Art Studio Gallery presents "Crimson Beauties," a mixed media exhibition with work from artists Sheila Holland, Diana Urbiztondo and Anne Hart Chay. *visualartstudiogallery.square.site*

EXHIBITIONS

THROUGH 5/11
The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University presents the 2025 VCUarts MFA Thesis Exhibition featuring the work of 26 developing artists from the program. The students spent two years of rigorous research and practice creating the pieces included in the showcase. Free. *icavcu.org*

THROUGH 6/8
The Branch Museum of Design exhibits work from landscape architect Charles Gillette, who created the "Virginia Garden" style. The showcase is on view in tandem with The Branch's Re-think Design series. Included with museum admission (suggested entrance fee is $5). *branchmuseum.org*

THROUGH 9/28
The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts presents "Frida: Beyond the Myth," a collection featuring more than 60 pieces by the renowned artist Frida Kahlo. $20. *vmfa.museum*

EVENTS

5/9-10
The Virginia Capital Trail Foundation's Cap2Cap bike race and fundraiser returns for the 20th year. Participants choose from four varying distances and can ride anywhere along the Capital Trail during race hours. Full course support is offered from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the weekend of the event. Registration starts at $50. *virginiacapitaltrail.org*

5/11
Agecroft Hall offers free garden admission and a live performance from the Richmond Concert Band to celebrate Mother's Day. Noon to 7:30 p.m. *agecrofthall.org*

5/15
Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden kicks off its annual Flowers After 5 concert series, continuing on the second and fourth Thursday each month through October. Live musical performances are from 5 to 8 p.m. Included with garden admission ($10 to $20). *lewisginter.org*

5/17
The Virginia Museum of History & Culture hosts HistoryFest, a daylong collection of more than 20 presentations on varied historical topics. Presentations start at 11 a.m., and the last session begins at 3:30 p.m. $85. *virginiahistory.org*

5/17
The Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia continues its Health Equity Community Conversations series with "Powerful Legacies: Racism, Inequality and Healthcare for African Americans" from 2 to 4 p.m. Included with museum admission ($6 to $10). *blackhistorymuseum.org*

5/17
The "Vintage on the Green" gala brings music, black-tie attire and fine dining to Maymont's Carriage House Lawn. The silent auction begins at 6 p.m., and the live auction and dinner start at 7 p.m. $375. *maymont.org*

5/24
Create small magazines containing drawings, pictures and memories of family members at The Springs Recreation Center's "Do It Yourself: Memory Makers" workshop from 2 to 4 p.m. Free. *henrico.gov*

—Compiled by Gray Pershing

FROM LEFT: JEREMY DANIEL; COURTESY VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION; ETHAN MCCANDLESS

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SPOTLIGHT

CLASSICAL CONNECTION

Chamber music gains momentum through a blend of eclectic programs and timeless offerings

By Christine Lu

Attending a Belvedere Series concert feels like being invited into an Old World salon, but with all the sensibilities of modern elegance. Classical music isn't known for being accessible, but Ingrid Keller, artistic director of The Belvedere Series, hopes to change that.

Keller has implemented her vision over the past three seasons by creating a graceful balance between hosting talented musicians, carefully curating the program and educating the audience about the experience. "Our mission is to facilitate discussion, curiosity and connection between performing artists and audience while presenting musicians of the highest caliber," Keller says.

Each performance feels unique thanks to thoughtfully selected pieces that blend the classical canon with new works by living composers. A reception follows each concert, the musicians mingling and talking with the attendees and further bridging the musical space between old and new. Eclectic themes like "For the End of Time," "Illumination," "The Roaring Twenties," "Prague Panorama" and "La Vie En Rose" allow the music and musicians to tell diverse stories that resonate in today's world.

The first season of The Belvedere Series comprised 11 performances between May 2022 and May 2023 at the historical and intimate Marburg House in Richmond's Byrd Park neighborhood. Due to growing interest, four of this season's concerts have been held at larger venues, including the Louis F. Ryan Recital Hall at St. Christopher's School, the Perkinson Recital Hall at the University of Richmond and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. The season opener at Ryan Recital Hall drew The Belvedere Series' biggest-ever audience with 350 attendees; a free student ticket initiative led to a 25% increase in student attendance from the previous season.

The current season will come to a close on June 13 with a performance by the two-time Grammy Award-winning Attacca Quartet. The group plays a range of works that include traditional classical pieces, electronica, soundtracks, video game music and contemporary collaborations. For their June appearance, they will perform "Three Essays" from their widely lauded album, "Evergreen," a collection of original works by contemporary composer Caroline Shaw. The music is inspired by language and particularly the lilting prose style of novelist Marilynne Robinson. The program also includes string quartets by Haydn and Mendelssohn, which round out the evening with the blend of classical and modern that characterizes this special concert series.

The Grammy Award-winning Attacca Quartet performs at St. Christopher's School on June 13 as part of The Belvedere Series. The show starts at 7 p.m. and tickets are $40.

Keller is already setting her sights on the 2025-26 season. The Belvedere Series will host the modern string quartet Owls, a world premiere by Guggenheim Fellow Kati Agócs and a performance by Olli Mustonen in a nine-person ensemble, the largest group to date. The upcoming season will also continue the series' salon concerts at the Marburg House, including a special recital by Grammy Award-winning tenor Karim Sulayman. For more information, visit *belvedereseries.org.*

DAVID GODDARD

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Nick Cave (American, born 1959), *Soundsuit*, 2010, Mixed media, 2012.4

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SPOTLIGHT

A UNIVERSAL SOUND

Ashland's 2025 song contest welcomes local and national voices

By Joan Tupponce

Ashland is on the hunt for a talented songwriter who can vocalize the virtues of the town for its third annual Ashland Song Competition. The contest, now ready for submissions at *ashlandfourthfridays.com*, is open to musicians of all ages and backgrounds, both local and national.

The contest was inspired by the song "Ashland, Ashland," written years ago for the Ashland Variety Show, which was produced by the Hanover Arts & Activities Center. "At the end of the show, they would sing 'Ashland, Ashland' as a display of community spirit," says Louise Keeton, Downtown Ashland Association's director of operations. "I wanted to spread that joy so the next generation of musicians could contribute their voices to Ashland's history."

When the contest began in 2023, Keeton was unsure of the response she would get from the songwriting community. But after receiving numerous inaugural submissions, and 21 entries in 2024, any apprehension she harbored dissipated. Last year, she increased the reach of the contest by introducing the 2024 Ashland Song Competition album, "Songs From the Center of the Universe," streaming on all major platforms and at *ashlandvirginia.com/hear*.

"We had about 14 songs submitted that met the criteria, so we added them to the album," Keeton says. Per the contest rules, song entries must be original, use family-friendly language, and not violate any laws. If lyrics are used, they must reference the town of Ashland.

The 2024 winning song, "You Already Know" by Ginny Ray, kicks off the album. "She grew up in Ashland," Keeton says. "She is a middle school student, and she was our youngest contestant."

Ashland resident Ginny Ray won the 2024 Ashland Song Competition with her tune about the historic town, "You Already Know."

Keeton hopes the added buzz of the album will lure more songwriters to this year's competition, which will be judged by local music professionals and is open to anyone who has a song to share. "Last year, one of the songwriters that submitted a song was from Nashville," Keeton says.

Contest winners receive a no-cost recording session at Free Jambalaya studios in downtown Ashland, which collaborates with artists from across the U.S. "A lot of people don't know that Ashland is home to a top-tier recording studio and music producer," Keeton says. Free Jambalaya will also release the winning song on streaming platforms via its label.

Free Jambalaya studio engineer Matt Treacy says the 2024 competition was an incredible experience. "It's one that makes me proud to be working in Ashland," he says. "When we started conceiving this project, I expected a few people to submit their music. I absolutely did not expect 25 submissions, or the high-quality songwriting. Working on a project like this shows you exactly how many great songwriters from our town are looking for a platform to share their music."

In addition to the recording session, the winning artist will be offered a performance slot at Ashland's annual Light Up the Tracks holiday kickoff celebration in November, which draws about 8,000 attendees. "The song winner can showcase their incredible talent in front of a captive audience," Keeton says.

With "Songs From the Center of the Universe" already out in the world, Keeton is looking forward to the second album, which will be released after the competition closes in August. She sees the contest and the albums as a way to introduce Ashland to the globe. "We are the Center of the Universe," she says. "We want to pull everyone into our orbit."

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PROFILE

GOING HER WAY

Marlene Paul, the founding director of ART 180, steps down after nearly 30 years

By Harry Kollatz Jr.

After 27 years at the helm of ART 180, the youth arts organization she co-founded, Marlene Paul passes the baton.

ASH DANIEL

The dreamlike tree of life on a wall at the corner of Hull Street and Cowardin Avenue is a depiction of youthful enthusiasm and aspiration. Titled "The Colors of the World" in 2010, the two-story mural represents the first large project of the early days of ART 180.

Marlene Paul and Kathleen Lane co-founded the nonprofit ART 180 in 1997. They conceived of an organization dedicated to inspiring creative expression in youths living amid challenging circumstances. The participants would delve into varied disciplines including music, dance, writing and painting.

Students from then-George Wythe and Huguenot high schools collaborated on the mural design. Artist Carlos Gutierrez, a muralist, oversaw the after-school project team, which was delivered to the site in the now shuttered "To the Bottom and Back" bus. "Carlos worked his magic with that mural," Paul remembers. "[It] helped that he's a dad. He got them all working together."

Beneath the outspread branches is the curve of a water-filled basin representing both the James River and a fountain that previouly stood on the corner. The once-dreamlike colors are faded through years of exposure to nature and the busy intersection's traffic. Paul lives nearby, and she occasionally passes by the mural. "When I see it, what comes to me is more than memory," she reflects. "It's an emotional, visceral sensation." The mural symbolizes challenges overcome, the significance of community, the passage of time and the many changes for the organization and herself. Paul has pictures of her daughter Maya, then not yet 4 years old, among the older kids and the scaffolding.

The concept for ART 180 began with a Legend — served up at the Manchester brewpub. Paul was a Richmonder who traveled the state seeking media coverage for what was then the Virginia Division of Litter Control and Recycling. She and Lane, a WORK advertising colleague, met over a beer to talk through an idea to use art to promote creativity in at-risk children and turn their lives around.

"There was a longing, a restlessness — an itch — to do something more meaningful with my time professionally. Surely there had to be more out there," Paul says. "Once I allowed that to surface and it ultimately manifested, then the idea developed its own identity, even early on. Then, keeping up with it became the driver."

Along the way, ART 180 grew from a startup into an integral part of the city's cultural and educational life. "Well, we've stopped being described as 'scrappy,'" Paul remarks wryly with a laugh. "That's the ultimate sign of maturity — the adjectives you move through. I think we've moved into 'respected,' which is good, right? That's maturity in the best sense of the word."

The tree of life initiative, part of ART 180's Intercultural Mural Project, taught Paul and the team about nonprofits partnering with government and the value of media and community. The mural's impetus came from the city's desire to visually reflect the changing composition of South Richmond's population. The effort combined three Richmond departments, including the division of Parks and Recreation's Hispanic Liaison Office. Bilingual educator Rachel Mehl helped coordinate the efforts of Spanish-speaking students from Mexico, El Salvador and the Philippines.

Once designed, the mural was supposed to be installed at the public library on Hull Street, but it demurred due to renovations. Following a column about the project in the Richmond Times-Dispatch by Michael Paul Williams, local musician Daniel Deckelman offered the wall of his Snake Oil Recording Studio. The psychedelic colors went up and media coverage followed. ›

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Five Factors to a Successful Malpractice Defense

Robert F. Donnelly
Attorney

Healthcare professionals dedicate their lives to patient care, yet face an increasing risk of medical malpractice claims that can threaten their reputation and career.

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4. Strategic planning for the best outcome
5. Tenacious courtroom and negotiation skills

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GOING HER WAY | CONT'D FROM PG. 46

Provoking media coverage has been something of a norm for ART 180. In April 2012, permission was received to install a selection of self-portraits and text from an exhibition titled "What Do You Stand For?" on the Monument Avenue median during Easter on Parade and the Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K. Taking the artwork as signage, someone complained, asking, "Would you like to see Nazi propaganda on Monument Avenue?"

Even today, the rhetorical flourish causes Paul to shake her head in disbelief. "You wouldn't think that something so innocent as self-portraits of 11- and 12-year-olds could become controversial," she says, "but it was not so innocent to some people because of who those children were. The theme of the project was about what matters to you, and the community responded."

The city revoked the permit, but Venture Richmond, then sponsors of the Easter parade, and homeowners worked together on a compromise. The city granted permission for residents to stand the works in front of their houses until the original permit expired.

Resident teaching artists Xolani Sivunda and Nastassja Swift stand alongside Marlene Paul at the unveiling of the public artwork "Umama, and so she sows" at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

ERIC TOMLIN

In retrospect, Paul views the event as a foreshadowing of 2020's tumult. The exhibit by youngsters, most of them nonwhite, in no way imagined removal of the street's statuary. However, the art irritated a barely concealed social nerve, although the reaction and condemnation were ultimately overshadowed by acceptance. Paul says, "I don't think public art is always about provocation, but in this case, it made people think, and that's the power art can possess."

Paul leaves the position of founding executive director by choice. "I didn't want to cling on," she explains, "and ... I didn't want someone else to make that decision for me." The restlessness that inspired ART 180 is now urging her to move on to the next phase, whatever that may be. Her farewell coincides with the 19th annual Block Party on Friday, May 2, in Jackson Ward. R

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LIVING

Mariela Gavino, owner of ILYSM Books

HADLEY CHITTUM

A bookseller finds a home in North Side P. 52

Chess is for everyone at RVA Pieces P. 54

High-tech tape for surgeons P. 56

Creative therapy expands in Richmond P. 58

From crafters, with love P. 60

Need a trip? Try the train P. 62

Edited by KEVIN JOHNSON

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SHOP TALK

WELL-LOVED LITERATURE

A pop-up bookseller goes permanent in North Side

By Kevin Johnson

ILYSM Books sells a curated collection of new and used publications.

"I knew if I ever wanted to name something, I would want it to be a phrase," Mariela Gavino says in explaining the name of her bookstore, ILYSM (I Love You So Much) Books. It's a phrase packed with meaning, much like the best book titles, and fitting for a collection of new and used volumes curated with care. "I also think 'I Love You So Much' is something people should be saying more often to each other, even if they're talking about a bookstore," she adds.

Gavino, a Virginia Commonwealth University graduate, brought her love of books to the North Side with the shop's grand opening this past Valentine's Day, another meaningful choice for the business. She founded the pop-up in 2022, sharing pre-owned books at markets in Richmond, and grew her collection in the years since in a way familiar to many book buyers.

"I was going to different thrift stores or sourcing books, and I would just get so excited about them — there's only so many books that I can take home before I'm basically hoarding at that point," Gavino says.

After months of on-the-fly events, she found a lasting home to share her collection — the former Scrap RVA space on Brookland Park Boulevard — in late 2024. The retail strip on the boulevard has been host to a flurry of new stores and restaurants as of late, and Gavino aims to blend in with the neighborhood's existing culture while bringing local vendors and authors to the community. "We're hoping that, as we get more established and we see how people interact with things, we can just keep changing it up and make it feel new, but also serve what people want," she says.

ILYSM Books is open 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays; it is closed on Mondays.

FOR THE FANS

A part-time comic seller lands a full-time storefront on Main Street

The Fan welcomes a new nerd culture destination with the opening of Black Dog Collectibles this month at 1616 W. Main St. The store, selling comics, trading cards and other memorabilia, is the brainchild of Mark Overby, a seasoned collector and familiar face at Richmond's fan conventions.

"Fifteen years ago, I was scrolling through Craigslist looking for patio furniture, and I ended up stumbling upon a comic collection. That's where it all started," Overby says. From there, his comic and memorabilia collection grew to fill five storage units, though it remained a hobby and side business alongside his day job as owner of Home Team Grill, the restaurant and sports bar on the same block as the shop's new storefront.

When the owner of the neighboring building offered the property for rent earlier this year, Overby jumped at the chance. "At first, I just saw it as a warehouse space," Overby admits. "I figured I'd finally have a place to organize everything – 300,000 comics worth of space." Eventually, Overby gave in, settling on a different kind of retail model. "I'm not opening with consistent hours," he explains. "For now, I'll open one weekend a month with a big sale, kind of like a pop-up shop but in a permanent space."

The shop's first sale weekend kicks off on Sunday, May 4. "I hope people will come in, browse and even bring in their own collections to sell," Overby says. "I want it to be an adventure for everyone who walks through the door."

—Nati Feliciano-Soto

FROM TOP: HADLEY CHITTUM; COURTESY BLACK DOG COLLECTIBLES

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TRY THIS

Check and Meet

A nonprofit games club wants to make chess for everyone

By Alyssa Hutton

JACLYN BROWN

Tucked away in the annex of the Richmond Public Library 's main branch on Franklin Street, around 35 chess enthusiasts spanning generations listen intently as Spenser Kearns relives a lost match against a chess master. Participants occasionally chime in, asking why he made certain moves, or protest as he shows them some of his fatal mistakes.

Kearns was speaking to members of RVA Pieces, a nonprofit chess club with a goal of growing and maintaining the city's chess community. The free-to-join club meets three times a week around town: Jackson Ward's GWARbar is home to Monday night meetups, Thursday nights are spent at Home Sweet Home in Carytown and Saturday afternoon's meetups are held at the library in winter months, but they transition to Monroe Park as temperatures rise.

For chess newcomers, the group hosts bimonthly beginner meetups alternating between Final Gravity Brewing in Lakeside and Manchester's Benchtop Brewing every other Wednesday. Another event series includes other games, such as Settlers of Catan and Mario Kart, played at Gallery5 in Jackson Ward monthly.

Tournaments are a highlight for club members, who currently hold small competitions biweekly at the Carytown Publix with a $5 entry; as the group grows, leaders hope to establish large and frequent contests in town. "Most tournaments you go to, it's like $100 bucks just to enter and it takes up your whole weekend," says Kearns, the group's president. "We want to make chess for everybody, so it's five bucks, show up, play one [game]."

Miguel Garcia, a children's mental health counselor in Richmond, attends club meetups and occasionally brings his patients, finding a benefit in the skills learned from playing chess such as following instructions and thinking before acting. "When they figure out how to play, they can realize that the game can be a sample of real life," Garcia says. "If you move like this, maybe it's a wrong move and you're going to have some negative consequences in the game or in life."

The club's community outreach director, Jared Thomson, moved from Seattle to Richmond two years ago and initially started playing to meet people and polish his skills. Now, as a board member, he's working on creating scholarships for children of lower-income families to participate in tournament play. Increasing access for Richmond youth, he says, is one of the most appealing parts of the club.

RVA Pieces officially became a nonprofit in 2023, and its leadership is aiming to further their philanthropic mission through grants while introducing new scholarships and improving conditions for members with upgrades like electronic game boards and better facilities when playing in Monroe Park. "We want to make Richmond one of the best places to be if you're a chess player," Kearns says. R

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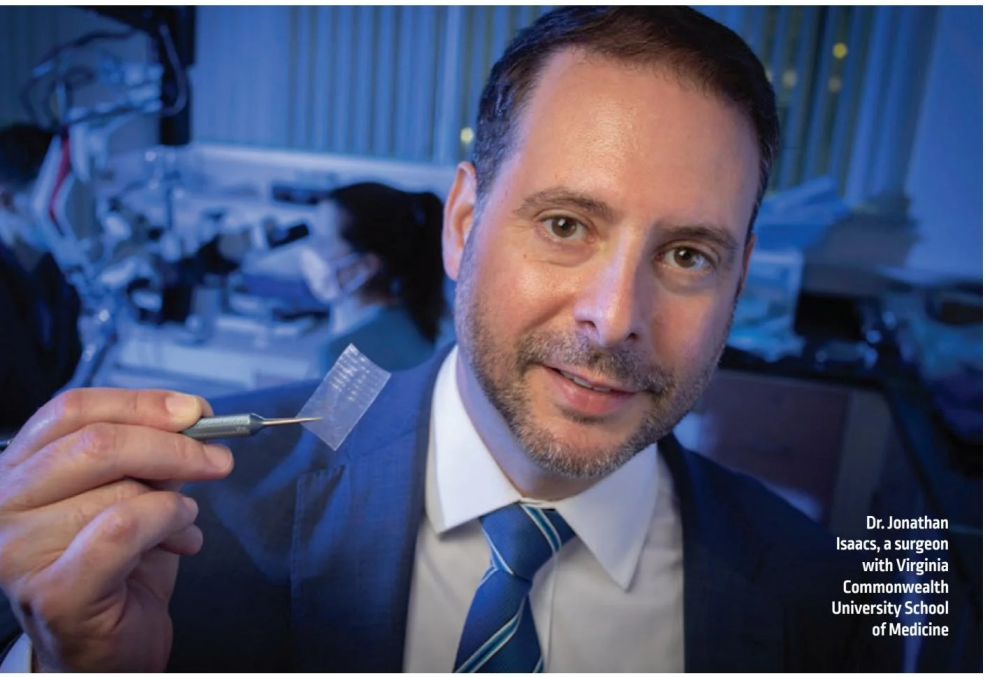
HEALTH

A SUTURE-FREE FUTURE

VCU researchers sew a better method of nerve repair

By D. Hunter Reardon



Dr. Jonathan Isaacs, a surgeon with Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine

During the seventh century, Alexandrian scholar Paulus Aegineta discovered that it was possible to heal nerves by suturing them together. Surgical techniques have improved since the days of the Byzantine Empire, but in the 21st century, nerve sutures are still an incredibly tricky procedure; only about 50% of operations result in full motor recovery.

Dr. Jonathan Isaacs, head of the nerve research lab at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine since 2002, is on a mission to increase those odds. Nerve Tape, a medical product developed by VCU Health researchers and spearheaded by Isaacs, was cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2022 and entered commercial sale through BioCircuit Technologies early last year. The invention takes a different approach to nerve repair.

"We noticed many years ago that the actual repair process seemed to be low-hanging fruit," Isaacs says. "It's a disruptive technology, way different than anything that's come before."

Over a decade ago, Isaacs drew up the idea for Nerve Tape on a napkin. Put simply, Nerve Tape is a bandage, made from biological material, that is wrapped around frayed nerves and uses tiny hooks to better attach the damaged ends.

"The body uses it as a scaffold and repopulates," Isaacs says. "As the nerves engage, more microhooks engage."

The results from early trials pointed in a promising direction. In one study with cadaver models, 97% of repairs made using Nerve Tape were successful; the process is 4.8 times faster and 2.6 times stronger than a micro suture repair.

"The human body is very variable, very complex," says Peter Lamothe, a VCU lab and research specialist who studies Nerve Tape on Isaacs' team.

"Nerves are like the wires of the body," Isaacs explains. "Nerves carry signals — signals from the brain to the muscles, telling muscles to contract; signals back up to the brain, so you can perceive the environment around you."

In order to repair these "wires," they must be rejoined. This is essentially the same discovery that Paulus Aegineta made in late antiquity.

But, as Isaacs says, "If the ends aren't lined up well, there is no conceivable way for those nerve fibers to grow together."

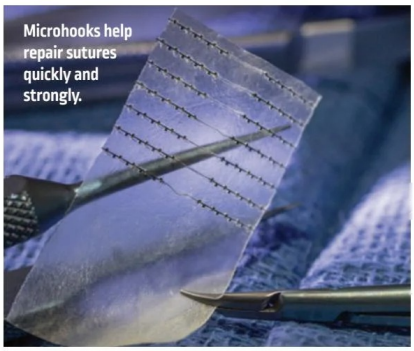
With its wrapping of biological material and microhooks, Nerve Tape essentially solves that problem.

The product's immediate success has generated attention; both the Department of Defense and the National Institute of Health have granted VCU resources for further study.

"The Department of Defense tends to like ideas like this, because they improve their ability to care for wounded soldiers. It's also a resource-expanding technology," Isaacs says. "Nerve Tape will make more surgeons capable of performing repairs. You won't have to refer people to a tertiary center."

To further prove the potential of Nerve Tape, work continues for researchers at VCU.

"We are making sure this is the best product it can be," Lamothe says. "Something Dr. Isaacs talks about is selling Nerve Tape on the strength of results. We want to continue to prove that this device is going to be safely used, and that it's going to be the best option out there."



Microhooks help repair sutures quickly and strongly.

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WELLNESS

An Artistic Approach

A specialized therapy practice grows its offerings

By Kari Smith

From top: Natalie Morison-Uzzle, Anna McChesney and Jillian Ulery of The Center for Creative Healing in their new location on Patterson Avenue

The Center for Creative Healing, a wellness and therapy practice specializing in art and music therapy, is celebrating a major milestone with the opening of a new location at 5311 Patterson Ave. in Richmond. The expansion is happening at a pivotal moment, as art and music therapies move toward being recognized as licensed mental health professions in Virginia.

Founded by counselor and music therapist Anna McChesney in 2009, the center originally began as a private practice specializing in music therapy. Over the years, it has evolved into a multidisciplinary creative therapy space, offering services that include music therapy, art therapy, play therapy and counseling. With an established presence in North Chesterfield, the new Richmond location brings the center's novel therapeutic services closer to more individuals and families that could benefit from a creative approach to therapy.

A dream catcher made by a counseling patient.

"When considering a second location, we recognized that many of our clients were traveling long distances to reach us," McChesney says. The new building, a former outpost of Achilles Foot & Ankle, has better access to public transit for Richmond residents, she adds.

The center's expansion comes on the heels of major progress in securing state recognition for art and music therapy as licensed mental health professions. In March 2020, Gov. Ralph Northam signed music therapy licensure into law, and art therapy followed suit shortly after, though progress on implementing these regulations stalled for over 500 days before movement resumed in 2024. Now, both fields are in the final regulatory phase, with the licensure framework currently under executive review.

McChesney, who serves on the state's Advisory Board on Music Therapy, explains that once approved by the governor, the regulations will be formally adopted, and applications for state licensure will open for practicing therapists. Art therapy licensure will fall under the jurisdiction of the Board of Counseling, while music therapy will be regulated alongside social work licensure.

"There's still a lot of misunderstanding about what we do," McChesney says. "But this is a crucial step in ensuring the public receives care from trained, licensed professionals who are qualified to integrate creative therapies into mental health treatment."

In addition to the new location, the Center for Creative Healing is also progressing programs at the two clinics through a three-year grant from the Commonwealth Neurotrauma Initiative Trust Fund. This funding, provided by the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, allows the Center to offer free music and art therapy services for people who have experienced concussions, traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries.

"These individuals are at a significantly higher risk of suicide, and this grant is designed to help reduce that risk," McChesney adds.

Looking ahead, leaders at the center still have expansion on the brain; specifically, into the Charlottesville area. They also hope to capitalize on the growing recognition of creative therapies in Virginia by offering continuing education, including seminars and training sessions for mental health professionals.

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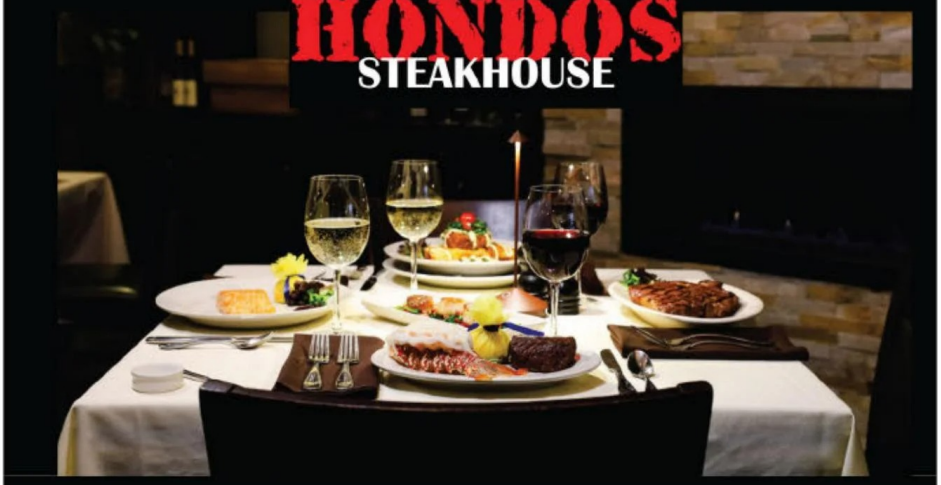

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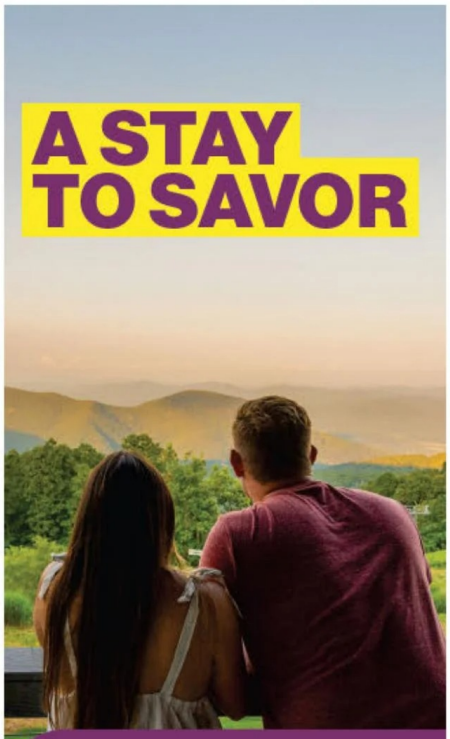

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GIVING BACK

MADE WITH LOVE

A crafty nonprofit turns hobbyists into helpers

By Kaitlin Davis

From left: Margaret Long of Little Hands and Susan Rickman of From The Heart Stitchers

Every stitch in a handmade gift signifies love through attention to detail — turning yarn and fabric into tangible reminders that no one should be forgotten in their time of need. In 2001, Richmonders Lois Moore and Dana Peterson started using their knitting skills to share that significance with their community, soon spinning off the group into From the Heart Stitchers.

The nonprofit organization brings crafters together to make and distribute supplies, like mittens, hats and blankets, to those in need. Since its inception, From the Heart has grown to nearly 2,000 volunteers across the Richmond metro area. While the Richmond distribution site, located at 1114 Westbriar Drive, is the original and largest resource center, there are also locations in Fredericksburg, Williamsburg and Dinwiddie. Together, these facilities distribute anywhere between 600 and 900 handmade items per week.

"[Our volunteers] sit down and create these items, knowing that they're going to go to someone in need — and it amazes me, some of the beautifully knit items that come in," says Susan Rickman, the vice president and distribution coordinator for From the Heart. "They will do gorgeous cabling and very intricate designs. It may have taken them weeks to complete that one item, and then they give it away. And that's dedication, that's love for fulfilling wishes and love for other people."

From The Heart recently hit a major milestone: over 600,000 items crafted and donated since their founding. These lovingly made creations include chemotherapy hats for cancer patients, knit caps for premature babies, warm mitten sets for the homeless and other items designed to meet specific needs.

The organization calls on their volunteers via weekly newsletters to create goods based on requested items from partner organizations. They can either use materials provided by From the Heart or purchase their own, but in the end, they drop off their items to be bagged and distributed to recipients such as Little Hands Virginia, a nonprofit providing necessities to families with children up to 3 years old.

"[Our partnership] has been so impactful," says Margaret Long, program director at Little Hands. "We get feedback from the families that we serve, that they do really appreciate those special, little, thoughtful touches, and to have something that was made just for them."

Since Little Hands serves about 250 families monthly, Long says it used to be difficult to fulfill requests that included items such as blankets, because most of their donations are secondhand. Within weeks of becoming partners, From the Heart filled a majority of Little Hands' donation requests.

"It's a gut-wrenching feeling to have a child request a blanket and not be able to provide it," Long says. "Now, we're overflowing with blankets, and it's really, like, the best problem to have."

The nonprofit welcomes all to help out; no experience is required, thanks to workshops hosted on an as-needed basis throughout the year. For those without the crafting skill, volunteers can contribute their time to packing and distributing goods. R

COURTESY FROM THE HEART STITCHERS

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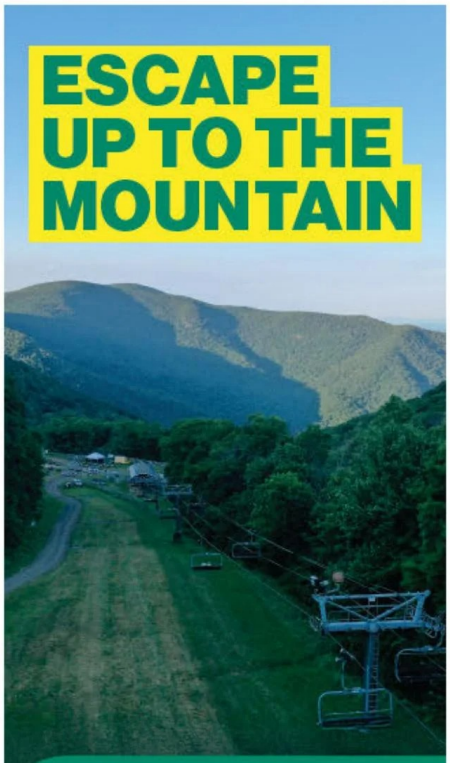

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FAMILY

A Fresh Track

For your next family vacation, consider taking the train

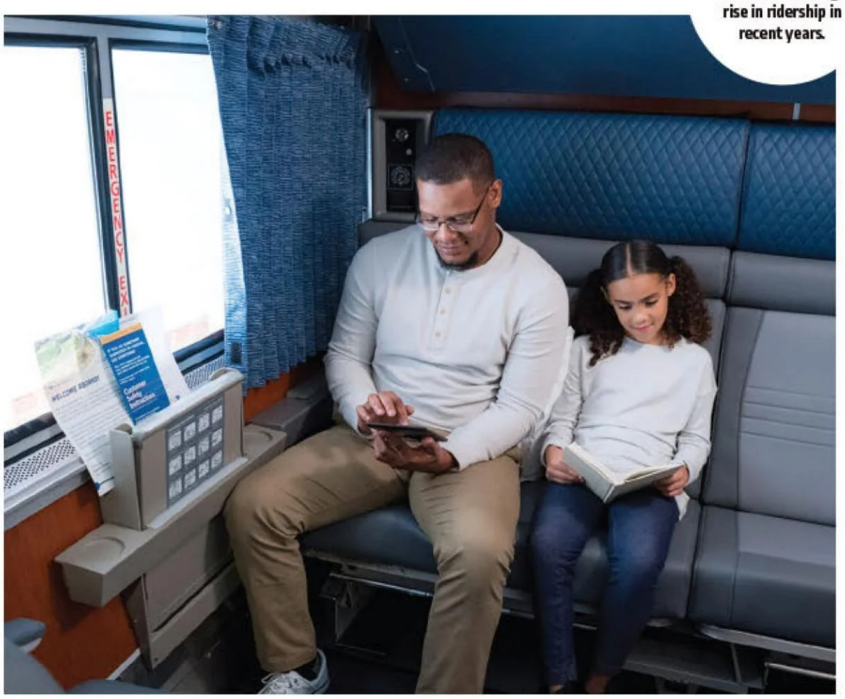
BY LAURA ANDERS LEE

One of my favorite family trips as a child was onboard an Amtrak taking us from our hometown of Mobile, Alabama, to my aunt's house in Boston. My brother and I loved all 36 hours of our journey, watching as the East Coast's major cities and coastal towns blurred past the window of our sleeper car.

For most of my life, I've lived in the Deep South and lacked good opportunities to travel by train. When my family and I moved to Richmond four years ago, I leapt at the chance to introduce my kids to the train, an instantly memorable experience that became a surprisingly easy catalyst for family vacations.

I booked our first departure in 2021 from Main Street Station, where the iconic clock tower and grand hall set the tone. The boys, who were 8 and 10 at the time, stood on the platform brimming with excitement, straining to be the first to see our arriving train. The two hours to Alexandria flew by as we played cards and ate peanut M&Ms in the cafe car. We didn't have to arrive early to go through long security lines, and my husband didn't complain about drivers in the left lane. When the boys grew restless, they got up and walked around, and we didn't stop for a bathroom once.

Since then, we've taken the train to Philadelphia and Baltimore, and for spring break we went to New York. The boys made friends with fellow passengers, playing Heads Up and trading solutions for their Rubik's cubes. Amtrak brought us right into Penn Station at Madison Square Garden, so we emerged from underground into the heart of the city like magic.



Train routes in Virginia and across the U.S. are seeing a rise in ridership in recent years.

COURTESY AMTRAK

The train hasn't just been for major getaways; we've also gone on several day trips to D.C., avoiding Interstate 95 traffic along with expensive hotels and parking. On Father's Day, we got off the train at Union Station and right onto the Metro for a Washington Nationals game. We were back in Richmond by dinnertime.

Passenger rail in the U.S. turns 200 this year and is long past its peak ridership of the 1940s. And yet for our family, train travel feels new and exciting. I can see why it's still the preferred mode of transportation in Europe, even though we lack its robust network and high-speed rail. In Austria, which has the same population as Virginia, trains accommodated 328 million passengers last year, compared to the Commonwealth's 2 million passengers.

But Karina Romero, communications manager for the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority, is pleased with our state's numbers. She says last year set a record for Amtrak Virginia's four routes between the capital and Richmond, Roanoke, Newport News and Norfolk.

The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority was established in 2020 to promote and expand passenger and commuter rail service. VPRA continues to invest in new infrastructure through the Transforming Rail in Virginia initiative, most notably the construction of a new bridge across the Potomac River into Washington.

"Our goal is to separate passenger and freight rail service to improve on-time performance of both," Romero says. "We're also working on extending service down to the New River Valley for the first time since 1979. These are taxpayer dollars hard at work, and new projects help keep cars particularly off I-95 and I-81."

The Passenger Rail Infrastructure and Investment Act was passed in 2009, requiring states to financially support shorter routes within their borders.

"Ridership that first year from

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> **[In 2024], Staples Mill was the Southeast's most popular station, with more than 460,000 passengers boarding."**

Washington, D.C., down to Lynchburg was expected to be about 30,000 passengers, but at the end of the year, 100,000 people had taken that train," Romero says. "It was clear that Virginians wanted to ride the train."

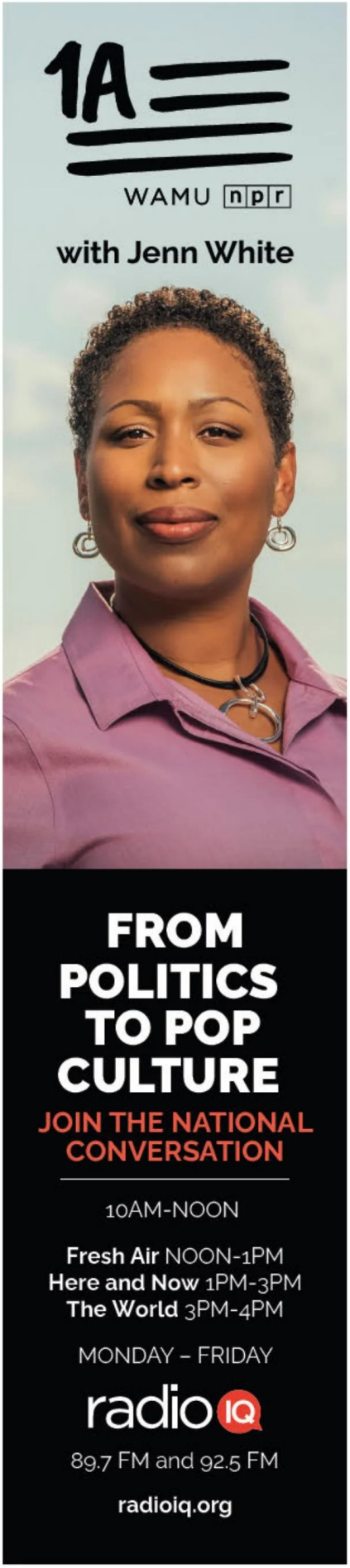
Since then, the number of passengers has been steadily increasing. In fiscal year 2024, Amtrak hit a nationwide ridership record, carrying 32.8 million passengers across their routes, up 15 percent from the previous year. Locally in the same period, ridership was up a combined 22 percent on routes through Virginia, and Staples Mill was the Southeast's most popular station, with more than 460,000 passengers boarding.

With surging ridership and new routes on the horizon, Romero encourages families to give train travel a try this summer to open vacation possibilities now and into the future.

"It's very affordable — lap kids are free and those under 12 are half price," she says. "If you have small kids, try a shorter trip to Ashland or even Fredericksburg — you get right off in the historic district. There are lots of things to see and do and you can catch an afternoon trip home."

While train travel can be fun and convenient, families should set realistic expectations and be prepared for travel delays. And there's always that pesky stop in D.C. when Amtrak swaps out the diesel locomotive for electric before heading up north. Unfortunately, Romero says Southern routes aren't replacing their diesel-powered trains.

"Virginia doesn't have the external infrastructure and space for traditional electric service," she explains. "But technology is improving all the time — there's a number of locomotive manufacturers looking into battery power, so you never know what the future might hold."



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CARSON MCNAMARA

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Family Matters

Local families and organizations work to improve the lives of foster kids

By Laura Anders Lee

Tamara Caissie's T-shirt says it all: "Caissies' Crew — Never a Dull Moment." She and her husband, Eugene, currently have six children under their roof, including four siblings they're fostering; a 13-year-old they fostered and adopted; and Hayden, 12, their youngest biological son, who has Down syndrome. The Caissies also have five adult children.

Dinners with the Caissies typically consist of big bowls of spaghetti, sloppy Joes, or grilled pork chops with mac and cheese and green beans. Friday is pizza night, and Wednesday night, everyone gets a $5 McDonald's Meal Deal on their way to therapy.

"You're with me, you're fine, you're safe," Caissie often tells the kids. "There's nothing to worry about right now except for you and your schoolwork."

A special education teacher at Arthur Ashe Elementary School, Caissie discovered five years ago that one of her students had been moving in and out of foster homes. Most of the Caissies' children were grown — only Hayden remained at home — so she and Eugene decided to become foster parents. They filled out the paperwork, completed three months of training and in 2020 opened their home to Caissie's student and his sister. Since then, the couple has taken in numerous children ranging in age from newborns to teenagers. They bought a bigger house, set up bunk beds and are now licensed to care for eight foster children.

"Some of the kids have been challenging but, being a special ed teacher, I can navigate around that," Caissie says. "What they've been through is not their fault. These are typical kids. They need consistency and they need love. I cannot reiterate that enough." ›

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Virginia's Foster Children

Just over 5,500 Virginia children are currently in foster care, according to an April 1, 2025, report by the Virginia Department of Social Services, a number that has remained more or less steady for a decade. In the central region, which includes Richmond, the children range in age from birth to over 18. Just over half of them are boys, and just under half of them are Black. About a third are white and the rest are multi-racial, Hispanic, Asian or of unknown heritage.

The leading cause for removing children from their homes is neglect, followed by parental drug abuse. When a child is deemed unsafe at home, they are put into the custody of their local department of social services and then placed in a temporary home. About 46% of the commonwealth's foster kids are living with a licensed foster family like the Caissies, while 17% live with relatives and nearly 15% are on their own or remain in limbo.

Last year, the average stay in foster care was 27 months, according to VDSS "Discharges from Foster Care" records. About half the children were either reunified with their birth families or placed with relatives, and 28% were adopted. (Of the latter group, about 70% were adopted by their foster parents.)

More than 1 in 5 kids aged out of foster care in 2024, meaning they were emancipated without a family placement. Without a parental figure in their lives, these young adults face much higher risks. They are less likely to graduate from high school or go to college than other teens and are much more likely to become homeless or pregnant, to be incarcerated, or to die by suicide, according to FosterVA, a foster care and adoption awareness campaign connected to VDSS.

Kinship Care

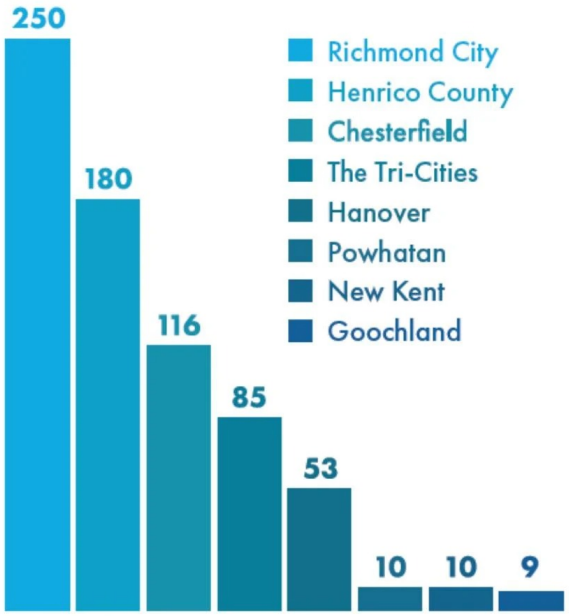
To improve the chances of success for foster children, Virginia lawmakers in 2024 passed legislation that prioritizes placing children with family members (i.e., kinship care) and providing them with social services and financial resources.

Del. Katrina Callsen of Charlottesville authored the Parental Child Safety Placement Program (PCSPP), which went into effect on July 1 last year. Under the new law, custody can remain with the parents while a child is placed with a relative for 90 days. During that time, the relative can receive the same benefits and support that a foster parent would for caring for the child.

The foster care program costs the state about $300 million a year, or $60,000 per child, for social services, case management, monthly stipends to foster parents, medical expenses, court hearings and more, according to VDSS. "Generally speaking, just under 50% of the kids that enter foster care are eligible for Title IV-E [federal] funds," says a VDSS spokesperson. "The state provides a match to the federal funds at a rate of about 50%." Title IV-E funding is authorized under the

Children in Foster Care in the Richmond Region

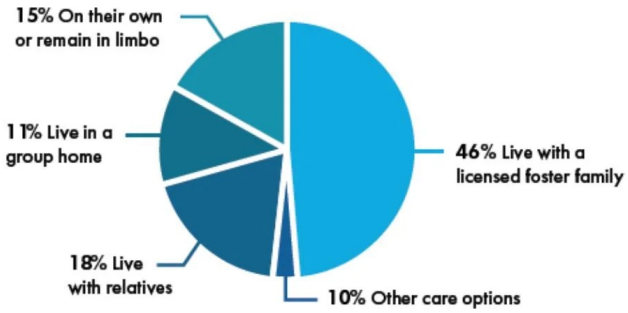
As of April 1, 2025



Source: Virginia Department of Social Services

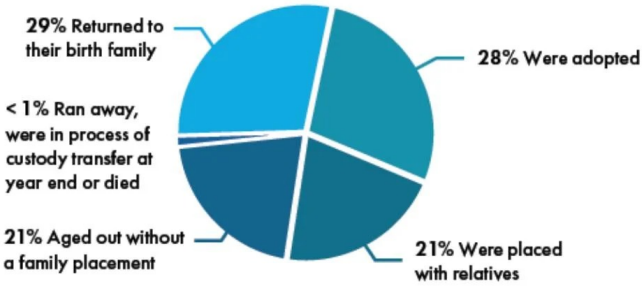
Where Did They Go?

VA children removed from their homes, as of April 1



What Happened?

VA children discharged from foster care, 2024



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The Caissies' blended family includes biological, adopted and foster children. *Clockwise from left:* Tammi Caissie holding Iveigh, 3; Tammi's mother, Bonny Picking; Tyler, 13; Eugene Caissie; Sierra, 23; Peyton, 5; Stitch, the dog; Hayden, 12; Shyann, 8; and Cody, 11.

JAY PAUL

Social Security Act. VDSS had not received any information from the federal government regarding funding cuts at press time.

Kinship care costs less than foster care and can be much more beneficial for the child. "If children can't be in their own home, they typically do better with family members or a teacher or neighbor they already trust," says Gretchen Brown, director of social services for Henrico County. "Being with someone they know helps with placement stability and reunification, since that relative is invested in the child and likely has influence on the parent."

A kinship caregiver may receive additional financial help if a child has been in their home for six months and if reunification with the parent has been ruled out. These KinGAP payments help with expenses such as parenting classes, school supplies and clothing, and the legal costs associated with guardianship and court appearances.

"The bill definitely helped create a standard of practice for how we serve and support children who are voluntarily placed into kinship homes outside of the foster care system," Brown says.

Henrico County hasn't played a significant role in placing children with relatives until recently, but now, almost half of their placements are with family members. Brown explains that children were living with relatives previously as well, but those placements are now being processed through the Department of Social Services and the caregivers are receiving benefits.

"We are able to formally assess, train and support kinship caregivers in both the PCSPP and foster care," Brown says. Henrico County has also hired a kinship navigator dedicated to supporting caregivers with funds from the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority, established in 2021 by the General Assembly.

Foster Parents

When family members aren't available or fit to take custody, a child likely goes to a foster family.

Kebra Jefferson and her husband, Christian, became first-time parents in 2017 when they fostered a 14-year-old. "It was so precious. He was experiencing so many firsts with us — his first time going to the beach, his first time picking out a real Christmas tree, his first time going trick-or-treating," Jefferson says. "Now he's in college and visiting us for spring break. It's a really big deal — only 3% of foster kids go to college. I'm so proud of him."

The Jeffersons also fostered 2- and 3-year-old siblings, whom they ended up adopting. "Now they're 9 and 10," Jefferson says. "One had medical needs and the other suffered quite a bit of trauma, but they've made a lot of progress. Our family members, our friends and our community have been so loving. My children are the only grandkids on both sides of the family, so they are spoiled rotten."

The Jeffersons founded RestoreTFC, a private therapeutic foster care agency, in 2022. They contract with local government entities to train foster parents and place children in their care.

"Social services departments do so many good things for the community, and they have to focus on more than foster care, so agencies like ours saw ›

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Christian and Kebra Jefferson became first-time parents in 2017 when they fostered a 14-year-old. They also run a private therapeutic foster care agency, RestoreTFC.

COURTESY KEBRA JEFFERSON

the need and rose to meet it," Jefferson says. "When my foster parents have everything they need to be successful, the child is successful. Foster parents can give us so many insights and help us determine the best needs for the child."

Another private foster care agency is HumanKind, which has four statewide locations including one in Richmond. The Caissies are one of their most dedicated foster families.

"We license and train foster parents, carefully match children with foster families, supervise visitations with biological parents and collaborate with a range of services to ensure children receive the care they need," says program manager Lee Turco. "This includes making referrals and coordinating with intensive in-home services, [applied behavior analysis] therapy, individual therapy, medication management and necessary medical appointments." Support for foster families includes 24-hour on-call assistance, monthly training and ongoing guidance.

"One family is adopting two little girls next week," Turco says. "It's a success story, but that means we're losing them as a foster family. We're always in need of quality, loving homes — the need is high."

Tamara Caissie adds that there are plenty of other ways people can offer support to the foster care community. "You can become a respite home for just a weekend to give foster parents a break, or you can be a short-term emergency placement — some of these kids are sleeping on their social worker's office floor until they can find somebody," she says. "There are lots of local organizations providing resources. I'd love a program for foster parents to get bigger vehicles so I can carry eight kids at a time."

Support Agencies

In addition to VDSS, foster care and adoption agencies, many organizations offer help to children in crisis situations.

Virginia's Kids Belong works to improve the experiences and outcomes for children in foster care. Their "I Belong" project uses video storytelling to help adoption-eligible kids advocate for a family. A few kids profiled recently include 15-year-old Maddie, who loves pop star Sabrina Carpenter and TikTok; 13-year-old Tay, who plays volleyball and wants to travel; and 11-year-old Tracey, who enjoys swimming, doing hair and having sleepovers. They're typical adolescents, all searching for families.

Richmond-based Fostering Acadia and The Success Foundation both support youth who are aging out of the foster care system. These organizations provide everything from financial planning to workforce readiness to prepare them for successful independent living.

When VDSS has difficulty placing a child into a foster home, United Methodist Family Services steps in. Celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, UMFS provides a range of services for children and families in the Richmond area.

"The children who come to us for foster care are typically teenagers, are from larger sibling groups, or have big behaviors and mental health challenges," says Kate Ockerman, director of philanthropy.

UMFS foster parents are trained to become treatment foster care homes and provide support for more difficult cases. Even though UMFS is actively recruiting and training foster families, Ockerman says there are still more kids than there are homes. "For our staff and

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Lee Turco of HumanKind

our foster parents, this is their life calling," she says. "We take a lot of care to meet these kids where they are. They are not malicious or doing this on purpose. They've had traumatic experiences happen to them. When you see it through that lens, you just love these kids and want the best for them."

UMFS also runs a residential facility for adolescents facing mental health crises. About 10 of its 50 patients are in foster care. Patients live and go to school on campus while undergoing treatment. "Our goal is for the kids to be ready to be placed with a family when they complete the program," Ockerman says.

Local nonprofit Patty's Hope takes a different approach by supporting biological mothers who have lost custody of their children. The organization was founded by Peter and Leila Gunning. In 2012, they became foster parents to a baby girl and wound up establishing a relationship with her mother, Patty. "Her story was one I would not wish on my worst enemy," Leila Gunning says.

As they fostered more children and met more mothers, they realized many had endured traumatic experiences. As the saying goes, hurt people hurt people.

"We spend a lot of time listening and helping these women not feel alone or ashamed," Gunning says. "It's good for the entire family if a mom can heal, become stable and have a healthy relationship with their child. That doesn't always equal reunification, but we hope for the best outcome for everyone."

Patty's Hope helps women advocate for safe housing, connect to trauma care, build a healthy community and develop life skills. Last year they opened Patty's Thrift near Libbie Mill where women can gain job experience through a work-to-shop program. They also encourage team building and reflection through group outings to Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens, Make Creative Studio and Peak Experiences.

"The physical challenge of climbing mimics the journey they're on," Gunning says. "It's an awesome visual. You're going to get to the top, but you can't climb a mountain on your own strength. You're not alone — you have all these people on the ground helping you." R

By The Numbers

5,532

Virginia children in foster care as of April 1

Of these, 4,692 were under the age of 18, and 840 were 18-21. The total has remained more or less steady for a decade.

11-15

The average age of children entering foster care in Virginia

30%

of U.S. foster care alumni may have PTSD

Virginia is investing in mental health services, substance use treatment and in-home parenting support to prevent unnecessary foster care placements and promote long-term stability for families.

3%

of U.S. foster care alumni obtain a college degree

In Virginia, the Great Expectations program has helped more than 3,000 former foster kids attend community college since its launch in 2008 and reports a 23% graduation rate among its students. Additional students apply directly to four-year universities.

20%

of Virginia teens who age out of foster care may experience homelessness, unemployment or and incarceration

Commonwealth programs like Great Expectations, Fostering Futures and Independent Living Services aim to provide stability, guidance, and resources to help youth transition successfully into adulthood.

49%

of Virginia foster kids graduate high school by age 19

87% of public school students graduate by age 18

FROM TOP: COURTESY LEE TURCO; DATA COURTESY VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES; NATIONAL FOSTER YOUTH INSTITUTE; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES; THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE

Kickstarter CEO Everette Taylor reflects on growing up in South Side and opening doors for others

BY MARK NEWTON
PHOTOS BY ZAID HAMID

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EVERETTE TAYLOR says his journey from South Richmond to New York City, where he has led the crowdfunding site Kickstarter since 2022, has been paved with kindness.

"It's something that has absolutely changed my life," the 35-year-old CEO says, emphasizing that one must also pay that kindness forward. "I really do believe it returns it back into your life."

Taylor's life story touches on the reality of growing up in Richmond in the '90s, the importance of community and public places, how to succeed and how to create opportunities for others along the way. And on May 10, he will summarize that journey for Virginia Commonwealth University students as the commencement speaker at their graduation.

"It's such a surreal moment for me because I grew up 10 minutes away on the south side of the city … but my whole life has been about doing things that weren't imaginable for people coming from my background and my situation, and that's the thing that keeps me going and inspires the work that I do at Kickstarter every single day."

ORIGIN STORY

Taylor has been an entrepreneur from the start. Born in 1989, he grew up in the Broad Rock neighborhood in South Side with his younger sister, Erika, and mother, Millicent, a custodian at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.

"She worked nights," he recalls, "and so I grew up really having to take care of myself and figure things out for myself … but growing up independent also meant that I spent a lot of time out in the streets."

Richmond wasn't an easy place to be at that time. In the '90s annual homicides hit triple digits, causing the city to be dubbed the murder capital of America in 1997. Police at the time attributed the violence to the prevalence of crack cocaine.

"Most of the men in my family were in jail, on drugs, caught up in the wrong things, and those are the things that I saw around me in Richmond," Taylor says. "And I knew that, as a young kid, I was impressionable. So, some of the people that I saw with the most things, like the nice cars and the Jordans and the jewelry, they were dealing drugs, and they were doing things that they shouldn't have been doing."

One of his first entrepreneurial endeavors involved buying bubble gum from a corner store and selling it to his fellow students at a markup. Taylor also mowed lawns with his cousin. "We were always trying to find different ways where we could hustle and make a little bit of money for ourselves," he says. "… I wanted enough money to be able to take care of myself and to be able to get things from the store, do things that I wanted to do as a kid," which included fueling an early interest in the arts.

By the time he was in middle school, however, Taylor says he had fallen in with the wrong crowd and was selling marijuana. He credits his mom with putting him back on the straight and narrow. "I think that was scary for her," he says, "because she saw what happened to other men in my family." Part of that intervention was getting her teenager a job interview with Eastern National, a nonprofit that operates gift stores nationwide at public places such as the Richmond National Battlefield Park. Taylor says her efforts and the job "genuinely saved my life."

PAST AND FUTURE

Taylor says he soon found himself in a room with Eastern National's Robert Koch, who was looking for a new marketing and sales associate.

"I was a kid, 14 years old, from the streets of Richmond, and I knew nothing about marketing. I knew nothing about sales," Taylor says. "… [H]e gave

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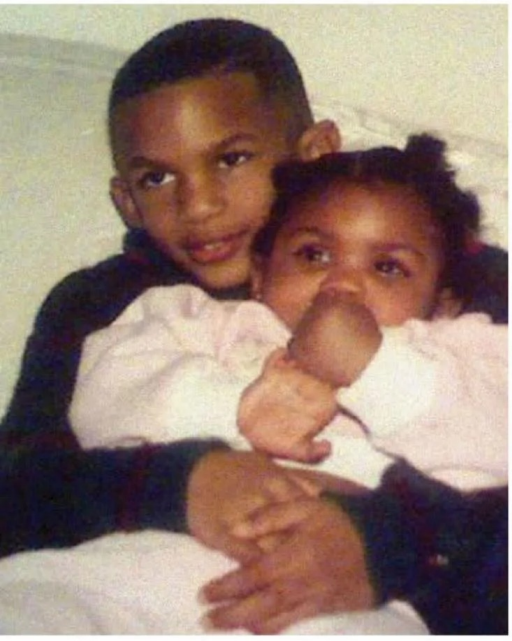

TOP: ZAID HAMID; BOTTOM: COURTESY EVERETTE TAYLOR

Clockwise from top: **Everette Taylor at the Broad Rock Branch Library; Taylor and his sister, Erika, in 1994; Taylor on a 1995 school field trip to Jamestown, his first time outside of Richmond**

me a shot with this job. And what this job did, one, was it introduced me to marketing, which was something that ended up changing my life. No. 2, it got me off the streets of Richmond and gave me something to do and also helped me make enough money to help support my mom. And three, it opened my eyes." He describes it as his first time "actually being around white people" and "meeting different people" from America and abroad. Working in the gift stores around the city also led him to explore local history.

"I had to learn about Jackson Ward and the prominence of Black entrepreneurs and Black lawyers and doctors and the Black entertainers and ... all of that stuff happening right there in my city, like 10 minutes from where I live," he says.

His senior year of high school, however, threw him a curveball. Eastern National eliminated his job after three years, but his experience with local historic sites led him to become a Richmond National Battlefield Park ranger at 17, working at places like Tredegar Iron Works and the Maggie L. Walker National Historical Site.

He also found himself living out of a car that didn't work. "That was a really, really tough time in my life," he recounts, "but it was also a very transformational period in my life, because it was when I discovered the world of tech."

During this period, Taylor frequented the Broad Rock Branch Library to beat the heat and surf the web. It was here that he read about Mark Zuckerburg and Jack Dorsey and their fledgling social media sites, Facebook and Twitter. A new path opened for him. "The beauty of that situation, of being homeless, was the opportunity [to discover] that world" of tech startups, he says.

At the same time, working as a park ranger at Civil War battlefields "opened my eyes to all different types of people, and it gave me the ability to be able to talk to anyone." He was encouraged by fellow park ranger and historian Mike Gorman to look into college, which led Taylor to search online for "tech schools in Virginia." This, predictably, turned up Virginia Tech, which he applied and was accepted to. "It surprised me," he says.

In an email, Gorman says Taylor "immediately impressed me because he possessed a curiosity and drive unusual even among the seasoned people at the NPS. ... I remember a thought I had (and hopefully expressed) back in ›

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the day: One day, we'll all be working for this guy!"

SILICON VALLEY VISION

Taylor's first stint at Virginia Tech was rough.

"I wanted to build tech. I'll be honest, I wasn't the best coder or developer. I was decent," he recalls about studying computer science. "I probably spent much too much time my freshman year — especially the first semester of my freshman year — partying. I had like a 2.0 GPA."

By his second semester, he says he was "locked in" and his GPA and his horizons were expanding. However, a family situation forced him to drop out in his second year and return home. He found himself working in a Chesterfield County Jo-Ann fabrics store, wondering if he was even making money after gas and food.

His proclivity for throwing parties, however, was unimpeded. "That was what I was good at at the time," he says.

It was in this context that he started his first business at age 19: EZ Events. "Not only did we throw parties" from Richmond to Greensboro, North Carolina, he says, "we built technology for people to buy tickets," creating a kind of precursor to Eventbrite. In 2011, he sold the business and was able to return to Virginia Tech. "I didn't make a ton of money," he says, "but that was like my first big success as an entrepreneur." He later learned the buyer of EZ Events sold the company again for "millions and millions of dollars."

"That's when I really started to learn about Silicon Valley," he says. "I was like, 'I need to leave Virginia.'" Two weeks later, he says, he left Blacksburg without a degree and drove to California.

Taylor quickly found himself under the wing of startup growth guru Sean Ellis, running marketing for one of Ellis' businesses. He soon started several of his own ventures, such as the marketing firm Millisense, named for his mother, under ET Enterprises. His success drew the attention of Sticker Mule, a custom decal company, which Taylor joined as chief marketing officer at 25 years old. He would go on to successfully manage marketing efforts for Artsy, a sales platform for fine art, which landed him on a Forbes list of the "World's Most Influential CMOs" and led to a profile in the Financial Times. This buzz led Kickstarter to consider and then hire him as CEO in September 2022.

"I'm still surprised to this day that I got the opportunity, because I was a very unorthodox candidate," Taylor muses. "Things moved very, very fast

Clockwise from right: **Taylor accepts the 2023 One Young World Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Taylor chats with Rabia Kamara, owner of the Kickstarter-funded Ruby Scoops ice cream shop.**

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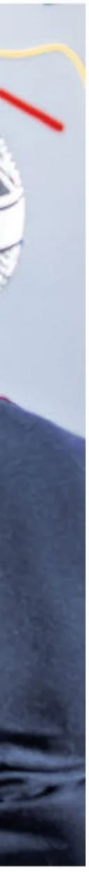

TOP: COURTESY EVERETTE TAYLOR; BOTTOM: ZAID HAMID

in my career, and I feel very fortunate."

As CEO, Taylor has acted to keep creators and supporters involved beyond the initial fundraising process, deploying tools to make Kickstarter a more comprehensive crowdfunding platform, introducing security features and improving the vetting process for projects.

"When I came to Kickstarter, we were in a decline," he says. "And every year I've been at Kickstarter, we've grown and grown. ... We've had more people launch projects this year already than ever [before]. We're seeing extraordinary growth at the company."

LOCAL IMPACT

Since its start in 2009, Kickstarter campaigns have helped Richmonders produce books, food trucks, tabletop games, skin care products and needle-felted magnetic slugs, to name a few projects.

What has drawn the most attention on the platform has been support for creative endeavors and the website's capacity to engage supporters. For the band Carbon Leaf — which is returning to its hometown of Richmond for a Music at Maymont show on Aug. 2 — Kickstarter was "a great way to give shape to those fans and the direct connection to what we do as artists, which is try and make something that resonates," lead singer Barry Privett says. Launched in 2020, the campaign for the band's 21st album eventually produced last year's "Time Is The Playground."

"We have done several fan-funded projects before, like through PledgeMusic, but this was our first Kickstarter," Privett says. "... We don't need cash to make a record; we want fans to feel involved and feel excited to participate."

Crowdfunding has also helped local businesses launch or expand. In the city, New York Deli was able to add a rooftop bar and event space, while the entrepreneurs behind Pizza Bones, Proper Pie Co. and Spotty Dog Ice Cream — among many others — were able to afford permanent spaces.

The North Side ice cream shop Ruby Scoops was another of those new businesses. Owner Rabia Kamara launched a $15,000 campaign in 2020 — "my real goal was $30K, but I put [$15,000] so that I would get funded," she says — that was fully funded in two or three days, eventually reaching $32,191. "It was basically my job for two weeks," the VCU graduate recalls. "It's all I did, talk about Kickstarter. We made videos and all sorts of stuff."

That all-hands-on-deck experience also makes it an ideal learning tool for the students and graduates of VCU's da Vinci Center for Innovation such as Jacked! Jackfruit Jerky's Julien Reininger and Malique Middleton of Gewd Botanicals. "It takes things out of the theoretical and makes it very real," says Garrett Westlake, the center's executive director. "[T]he difference [with] putting [an idea] on a platform like Kickstarter is you can find out whether it's a million-dollar idea."

OPENING DOORS

In February, Taylor visited the da Vinci Center, and his impression on students — and VCU President Michael Rao — led to his selection as the university's 2025 commencement speaker. "I think Everett's career path and his success looks different than a lot of people's," Westlake says, "and I think that permission to achieve in a different sort of way is the message that I think will really resonate with VCU students."

Graduation won't be the last time Taylor visits VCU, either. Westlake says Taylor will be an affiliate faculty member for the 2025-26 school year, allowing him to be a guest lecturer and student mentor. VCU is also exploring a potential scholarship in Taylor's honor to benefit a nontraditional graduate student, according to Westlake.

"I'm excited for that — that's pretty sick," Taylor says. "I was the first person in my family to go to college ... and most people I grew up around, they weren't going to school or college or anything like that."

In his commencement speech, Taylor hopes to impress upon the Class of 2025 that their circumstances shouldn't dictate their futures and that "time is the most valuable thing that we have," he says. "Spending time with the people that you love and the things that you love is the most important aspect of life and, on the flip side, in terms of leading yourself to success, [is] understanding the sacrifices that you have to make and understanding how you use your time to get to where you want to be."

Spending time away from Richmond has only grown his appreciation for it, Taylor says while standing outside the Broad Rock library. "Being [from] here, we wear that with a badge of honor because we dealt with a lot of stuff. I appreciate all the hardships and all the things that I experienced because it made me tough as nails."

Today, South Side is also a place for reflection and connection.

"My grandmother Mable Taylor passed away this January," Taylor recalls, "... she would just tell me how proud she was of me and how she couldn't even understand the magnitude of the things that I was doing because what I've done in my career so far surpasses what anything in my family or the people in my neighborhood that I grew up in have been able to do. And I feel so fortunate to be in that position now, to be able to inspire others and come back to Richmond and deliver this commencement speech and hopefully inspire a new generation of people." R

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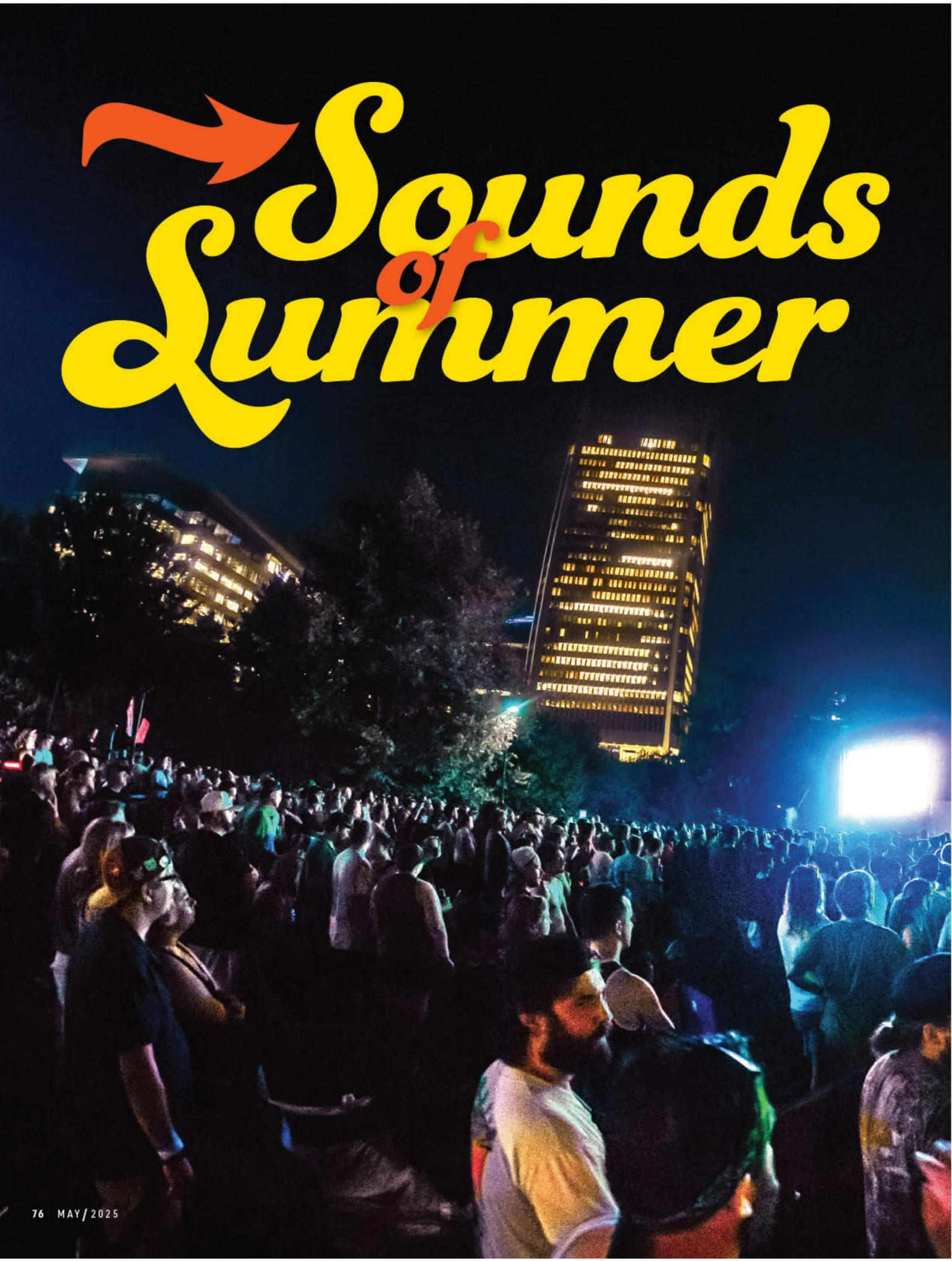
7 Sounds of Summer



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RICHMOND'S MUSIC SCENE IS HEATING UP WITH FESTIVALS, OUTDOOR CONCERTS AND MORE

By Adam Cheek, Nicole Cohen, Davy Jones and Peter McElhinney

From budding artists to Grammy winners, our local music scene is a mesh of genres and talents that rivals that of any midsized metro area. This summer, Richmonders will have even more opportunities to sway when the Allianz Amphitheater at Riverfront debuts this June and casual, post-workday shows return to Glen Allen with the reinstatement of After Hours Concerts at Innsbrook.

In preparation for the upcoming summer music season, we spoke with local musicians to get their takes on the hottest venues to visit and what they're anticipating most in the months ahead. We also chatted with the 2025 Newlin Music Prize winner, Drook, to learn more about the pop fusion band and their latest album. Whether you're looking for can't-miss concerts or offbeat special events, the following pages are your ticket to a summer of sounds.

JOEY WHARTON COURTESY BROADBERRY ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

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'ALL OF YOUR THOUGHTS'

Pop band Drook reflects on their Newlin Music Prize win and summer tunes in the River City

Through experiments with electronica and hyperpop, the sound of Richmond-based band Drook (*facebook.com/drookband*) has been in a constant state of evolution, though vocalist Liza Grishaeva says their music aligns mostly with the pop genre. Comprising Grishaeva, guitarist Matthew Shultz and drummer Tyler Smith, Drook is the 2025 Newlin Music Prize winner. Along with the top nod is a $2,500 cash prize. In its fourth year, the prize honors musicians in the Richmond-Petersburg region who have released a full-length album during the previous calendar year.

The trio were nominated for their 2024 album, "The Pure Joy of Jumping," and out of 200 nominated artists, they made the short list of 20. It was a tough field that featured other local standouts including Holy Roller, King Kaiju, Nickelus F and Tyler Meacham.

"I think we were kind of surprised to win it just in terms of [our] genre," Grishaeva says. "Sometimes we feel a bit alone in Richmond in terms of being a pop band and the kind of pop band that we are." She notes that there are a variety of subgenres in major cities, but less so in the Richmond area.

The band often tours the South, where Drook's fusion of indie electronica, rock and pop music isn't commonly performed, she says, but the band is happy to introduce new fans to the sound. "We really care about presenting this type of music in the South," she explains. "So, it feels really special to have gotten this award for that reason. It's just nice to know that the kind of music that we make, specifically the genre, is maybe just valued by more people than we thought."

Newlin Music Prize President Doug Nunally says, "Drook's win is a celebration of the DIY spirit that continues to thrive in Richmond. ... Their sound reflects the community they come from, a blend of diverse styles that never loses its cohesive identity, whether the trio is tearing through frenetic breakbeats or diving headfirst into immersive walls of sound."

Drook's members are in their mid-to-late 20s and are longtime friends. They do everything together; they're even roommates in Richmond's Randolph neighborhood. The band has experienced numerous different lineups and name changes since its inception several years ago, but Smith and Grishaeva have been a consistent thread. "Me and Tyler just met at a show when we were younger and we both really wanted to play in bands, and I think that we were pretty desperately looking for someone to take us seriously,"

ABOVE: COURTESY DROOK; OPPOSITE PAGE: LUCIENNE NGHIEM/COURTESY DROOK

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Grishaeva says.

In 2019, the band self-released their music under the name She. At the time, they were focused more on indie rock, but in 2022, they began developing their sound into what it has become today. They rebranded under the name Drook, which they sourced from Grishaeva's 2018 solo EP, "Life In Estates" (which earned a 2023 Newlin Music Prize nomination). Drook's 2023 album, "Mr. Fisher's Dirty Club Mix," showcased the group's expansion into electronica. Their latest release, "The Pure Joy of Jumping," is the culmination of their changing music style, with dreamy pop and electronic elements blended into rhythmic rock melodies.

"Our sound really changed when Matt came into the band because he has been working on a laptop since he was like 8 years old and he was just more skilled in electronic music," Grishaeva notes. She says time off from performing and touring during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to their evolved sound. "We got so much time to explore our sonic palettes, and we just were like, 'Wow, we really gravitate to not only rock music and band music, but also electronic music.' A lot of our influences are electronic musicians, and so COVID gave us time to be able to learn how to make electronic music together." Grishaeva names musicians including Aphex Twin, Radiohead, The 1975, Sophie and Charli XCX as inspirations for the band.

Grishaeva recommends that concertgoers look beyond the festivals for choice music at local venues such as The National and The Camel. She also mentions under-the-radar spots with pop-up performers. "I'm a bit more tapped into the local house show scene, but those houses are constantly changing, so what I would say is try to keep the everchanging houses on your radar," she says.

Grishaeva also notes the importance of smaller stages in the development of budding local artists. Providing a platform and recognition for local musicians is part of the goal of the Newlin Music Prize.

"Presenting the Newlin Music Prize over the past four years has been a true honor, something made even more meaningful by the fact that it's powered by the local community," Nunnally says. "While peer recognition is powerful, the financial support we provide has become just as vital. As corporate monopolies continue to dominate streaming platforms and control access to live venues, opportunities for musicians have narrowed, making community-driven initiatives like this one more essential than ever." ***—NC***

Drook is embarking on a six-week North American tour this summer.

NATIONAL MEETS LOCAL

6/7 The '80s hitmaker Rick Springfield, with songs such as "Jessie's Girl" and "Don't Talk to Strangers," brings his "I Want My '80s Tour" to the Allianz Amphitheater at Riverfront. The music begins at 7 p.m. and tickets start at $55 (VIP packages are available). *allianzamphitheater.com*

6/10 As part of the LiVE Loud concert series, indie rock band Wallows performs at Brown's Island with special guest pop group Porches. Gates open at 6 p.m. Tickets start at $50 (VIP packages are available). *thebroadberry.com*

7/12 San Francisco rockers Counting Crows take the Allianz Amphitheater at Riverfront stage fresh off the release of their new album, "Butter Miracle, The Complete Sweets!" an extension of the band's 2021 EP "Butter Miracle, Suite One." The Gaslight Anthem kicks off the show at 7:30 p.m. Tickets start at $40 (VIP packages are available). *allianzamphitheater.com*

8/1 Grammy-winning singer-songwriter and founder of Creedence Clearwater Revival John Fogerty brings his "The Celebration Tour" to Atlantic Union Bank After Hours in Doswell. 7 p.m. Tickets start at $49 (VIP packages are available). *afterhoursconcertseries.com*

8/20 California-based indie pop band Fitz and the Tantrums stops at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden as part of the venue's Groovin' in the Garden series. 7:30 p.m. Tickets start at $38 (VIP packages are available). *lewisginter.org*

8/29 Bluegrass and country singer, fiddler, and music producer Alison Krauss is joined by her band, Union Station, and guitarist Jerry Douglas at the Allianz Amphitheater at Riverfront. The show begins at 7:30 p.m. Tickets start at $50. *allianzamphitheater.com*

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DAN AND THE FAM

DANANDTHEFAM.COM

These ascendent purveyors of psychedelic groove music are led by singer and guitarist Danny DeMarais. They will be releasing a new album toward the end of 2025. Catch their performance during Dominion Energy Riverrock at Brown's Island on May 18.

Richmond magazine: Are there any specific venues that you enjoy playing this time of year?
Danny DeMarais: I love Get Tight Lounge. That always brings a good outdoor crowd. ... River City Roll is a fun time with the open windows and the big space and stage. And a festival that I have not yet performed [at] but am hoping to soon – I've attended a few years now – is Daydream Fest. [Organizer] Pete LeBlanc does great with that. It's just a great thing for the Richmond community.

RM: What are your top spots for catching national artists?
DeMarais: I love The Broadberry. I feel like that's a great stage where you get a lot of artists who may not be at full-scale [venues] like The National or The NorVa [in Norfolk] yet, but still amazing artists. And you can get close to that stage and not be fighting with thousands of people. Also, The National is always great.

RM: How would you describe the evolution of Richmond's music scene?
DeMarais: This is going to sound funny, but I feel like jam is the new metal, in that there are so many subgenres. There's bluegrass jam, there are funk jam bands, prog jam bands, electronic jam bands, jazz bands that are now jam bands. ... It's a really cool thing to have, because I think there can be a bad rap, especially in this city, of being a jam band compared to a jazz band or an indie band, where some of these more creative artist types are flocking towards. ... It's really flourishing; to be just a bunch of different genres that are elevating their live show experience.

RM: What are your favorite local things to do during summer?
DeMarais: Definitely go to the river, lay on a rock like a lizard. Love doing that. I love just walking around the Museum District and Carytown in the summertime. You never really know where your eye will take you. A new shop will pop up, a new restaurant will open, and you can walk the same walk a hundred different times and experience a new place or new people. *–DJ*

WEEKEND PLANS

WEEKENDPLANSMUSIC.COM

Blending funk, soul, R&B and other genres, the eight-piece Weekend Plans joins Friday Cheers' RVA Music Night on May 23. One of the group's founding members, Kayen Wilborn, takes on trumpet and singing duties. The band also plans to release its second album toward the end of the summer.

Richmond magazine: What are your favorite local music venues or festivals?
Kayen Wilborn: We've done the Richmond Jazz and Music Festival, I think, three times, and we've also loved the Virginia Pride Festival. As far as venues, a favorite is Dogwood Dell, as a musician and performer, but also to go to see some of my friends or colleagues throw down.

RM: What are your top spots for catching Richmond-based artists?
Wilborn: The number one for me is The Camel. That's the spot that we really got our legs under us. A lot of Richmond musicians play there, and I still go there as a fan. Get Tight Lounge has a good mix of Richmond artists and some nationally touring acts.

RM: How would you describe the evolution of Richmond's music scene?
Wilborn: There's just been an explosion of really great artists of any genre and an exponential bolstering of people's freedom of expression. *–AC*

BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY DAN AND THE FAM; *ABOVE:* COURTESY WEEKEND PLANS

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MEKONG XPRESS

INSTAGRAM.COM/ MEKONG_XPRESS

A collective of experienced musicians including guitarist and vocalist Andrew Rapisarda, Mekong Xpress blends rock, funk, soul and jazz. The band joins country duo The War and Treaty during Friday Cheers at Brown's Island on June 20.

Richmond magazine: What are your favorite local music venues or festivals?
Andrew Rapisarda: Anything outdoors in the summer is always fun. Friday Cheers is the mother of them all. Everybody knows to go down there, and it's awesome because you've got the trains going by, the river there and you don't even really feel like you're in a venue. ... I don't know that every city has something like that.

RM: Which concerts are you looking forward to experiencing this summer?
Rapisarda: A lot of my friends will be playing the **Daydream Fest.** I'm going with my family to see Bonnie Raitt [at the Altria Theater]. I always look forward to seeing Butcher Brown, and I've really liked seeing Erin & The Wildfire lately.

RM: What are your top spots for catching national artists?
Rapisarda: The National is a great place. I grew up going to the Altria Theater. As far as national acts, that place is historic. My dad saw Jimi Hendrix there.

RM: How would you describe the evolution of Richmond's music scene?
Rapisarda: We're old *[laughs]*, so we have the older perspective. Honestly, it's just brimming with creativity. I'm always surprised at what artists are coming up with. *–AC*

Daydream Fest returns to Main Line Brewery for the fourth time on May 26.

SUMMER SERIES

6/13 Performing a mix of cumbia and Afro-Cuban jazz, La Lom plays Friday Cheers at Brown's Island, joined by Afro-Zen Allstars. 6:30 p.m. $10 ($15 at gate). *venturerichmond.com*

6/13 Country star Megan Moroney takes the stage during Virginia Credit Union Live at Richmond Raceway. With albums in both 2023 and 2024, Moroney will play the venue as part of her "Am I Okay?" tour. The show begins at 8 p.m. and tickets start at $240. *vaculive.com*

6/19 Singer-songwriter Larry Fleet is joined by country band Homegrown as part of the Down on The Farm Concert Series at Hanover Vegetable Farm, one of nearly a dozen shows scheduled at the site this summer. Gates open at 5:30 p.m. and tickets start at $30. Season tickets start at $95. *hanovervegetablefarm.com*

7/19 During the Allianz Amphitheater at Riverfront's inaugural season, Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit play at 7 p.m. With hit songs like "Seven-Mile Island," "Cumberland Gap" and "Go It Alone" in their discography, Isbell and company were among the first acts announced to appear at the newly constructed venue. Tickets start at $54.50. *allianzamphitheater.com*

7/23 Indie artist Iron & Wine and folk trio I'm With Her perform during Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden's Groovin' in the Garden series. 6:30 p.m. Tickets start at $44.50. *lewisginter.org*

8/1 Georgia-based rockers Drive-By Truckers headline Music at Maymont, joined by Deer Tick and Thelma and the Sleaze. The band has more than a dozen studio albums to its name and has been actively performing for nearly 30 years. 6 p.m. General admission is $35; Gold Circle tickets are $55. *musicatmaymont.com*

ABOVE: COURTESY MEKONG XPRESS; *BELOW RIGHT:* COURTESY BARIPETE PRODUCTIONS

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Prabir Mehta often performs intimate shows at Révéler in Carytown.

PRABIR MEHTA

HIPRABIR.COM

Singer-songwriter Prabir Mehta plays melodic rock 'n' roll with a Gujarati twist, as if Tom Petty had roots in Mumbai. He performs shows solo and with his group, The Prabir Trio. Catch him at Hardywood Park Craft Brewery's Ownby Lane location June 29. His 16 years as board chair at Gallery5 give him a unique dual perspective of the RVA scene as performer and venue operator.

Richmond magazine: What are your favorite local music venues?
Prabir Mehta: It's hard for me to pick just one. I'm a really big fan of The Broadberry. I think they just do an excellent job of making an event big and beautiful. Anytime Beer Company is super fun; I love [it] as a new venue in Richmond. Brambly Park is great for jazz on a Sunday afternoon. Chilton House has world-renowned Americana songwriters. Gramophone Winery in Westover Hills is a lovely under-the-radar place. It's just a great room in a great neighborhood filled with folks that want to just walk in, chill and check out some music. Another less-known venue is the Gold Lion on Hull Street, an Indian restaurant slash cocktail bar slash performance spot.

RM: Which concerts are you looking forward to experiencing this summer?
Mehta: I play so many gigs that I rarely get to go to shows, especially on weekends. I see a lot of stuff happening at The National and at Brown's Island that I wish I could go to. My heart always tends to go in the direction of local shows, with musicians who are not only friends but are doing wonderful things. Piranha Rama is awesome. I love our ethereal bands like Miramar or Yeni Nostalji. Anytime Ms. Jaylin Brown plays, I want to be there.

RM: What are your favorite local music festivals or series?
Mehta: Obviously, Friday Cheers is going to be great. Pete LeBlanc does a wonderful job with the Daydream Fest, getting local artists represented onstage on Memorial Day weekend at Main Line Brewery. The Richmond Folk Festival is the big boy in town. It is a reminder to the community that music doesn't have to be guitars strummed through distortion pedals. And it is the one time of the year Indian music doesn't seem out of place. Tyler Meacham's Anyfolk RVA series is just killer, one of the coolest, high-quality things in Richmond music in about a decade.

RM: How would you describe the evolution of Richmond's music scene?
Mehta: Bands, promoters [and] venues come and go, but the vibe remains great. We have the advantage and disadvantage of being a midsized city. You play with your friends, and then once in a blue moon you are asked to open for a big touring act. For the artists here, through all the changes, love for one another and the community has remained the guiding light. *–PM*

TYLER MEACHAM

TYLERMEACHAM.COM

Singer-songwriter Tyler Meacham mostly plays her own songs, always under her own name, but not necessarily on her own. She loves playing with a full band but is equally adept by herself with her guitar. Catch her at Brambly Park in Scott's Addition on June 6.

Richmond magazine: What are your favorite local music venues?
Tyler Meacham: I really do love Révéler. And I spend so many hours seeing my friends play at The Camel that it feels really comfortable.

RM: Is there a summer concert series you particularly love?
Meacham: I am definitely a homebody, so anything that gets me out of the house, like Friday Cheers, is great.

RM: How would you describe the evolution of Richmond's music scene?
Meacham: The Richmond scene is always brimming on being explosive. I lived in Los Angeles and have spent time in New York. We are fortunate to be here, in a perfect location, with so many different musical styles.

RM: Is there anything you recommend people check out?
Meacham: I started a project called Anyfolk [*instagram.com/anyfolkrva*]. It's a free songwriter and arts showcase that happens every other Wednesday. My advice is to see someone you've never heard of before. Chances are, they are from your neighborhood and have something great to offer. *–PM*

THIS PAGE: PETER MCELHINNEY

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NICKELUS F

TRICKDICE.CO

Local hip-hop luminary Nickelus F earned a spot on the most recent Newlin Music Prize short list thanks to his 2024 album, "MMCHT," which was released via his new label, Trick Dice Records. The artist will appear at Daydream Fest at Main Line Brewery on May 26.

RVA Boombox hosts intimate shows in its broadcasting studio/performance space.

Richmond magazine: Which Richmond venues would you say are underrated for experiencing summer concerts?
Nickelus F: I really like Cobra Cabana during the summertime. It's an outdoor space. I've always had a good time there, whether it's an actual show or a DJ spinning. I like that spot.

RM: What are your favorite local music venues?
Nickelus F: I really like RVA Boombox. I love the intimate nature of that spot. The Broadberry is always cool, it has a patio out back and whatnot. That's normally for certain sorts of shows, but if we're talking local talent, I like RVA Boombox.

RM: How did you feel making the short list for the Newlin Music Prize?
Nickelus F: That was super dope. I honestly didn't even know that I was on [the short list] until they told me about it. Had I known, I probably would have campaigned a little bit. But I think it's super awesome. I'm honored, and I'm glad that people were vibing with the project. I plan to put out a whole lot more.–*DJ*

Nickelus F performing at The Broadberry in Richmond's Fan District

ABOVE: COURTESY RVA BOOMBOX; *BELOW RIGHT:* METTA BASTET

OUTDOOR FESTIVALS

5/16-18 The nation's premier outdoor sports and music festival, Riverrock returns with a stellar lineup of bands performing at Brown's Island, from locals like Dan & The Fam (jam) and Sweet Potatoes (jazz) to national acts like Mountain Grass Unit (bluegrass) and Mikaela Davis (alt-country). Admission is free. *riverrockrva.com*

5/26 The fourth annual Daydream Fest includes hip-hop standard-bearer Nickelus F, masterful multi-instrumentalist Charlie Glenn and the big band led by Butcher Brown bassist Andrew Randazzo. 1 to 11 p.m. at Main Line Brewery. $25 to $45. *daydreamfest.com*

8/2 For one Saturday in early August, Shockoe Bottom transforms into a multi-stage block party celebrating Richmond's musical talent during 804 Day. Varied genres and plentiful local vendors and nonprofits make this a can't-miss summer event. 12:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the 17th Street Market area. Admission is free. *shockoerecords.com/804day*

8/9 Psychedelic rock band Lotus headlines the JamPacked Craft Beer & Music Festival at Brown's Island. Music starts at 3:30 p.m. $45 (VIP tickets are $125). *jampackedfest.com*

8/30 A fun way to end the summer with a smile on your face, the Richmond Comedy and Music festival takes place at Richmond Diversity Center featuring stand-up comedians and live musicians. The event kicks off at 7 p.m. and tickets are $25 to $35. *eventbrite.com*

TBD Household names in jazz and R&B converge at Maymont each August for the three-day Richmond Jazz and Music Festival. With access to the estate's gardens and facilities, attendees enjoy beauty both onstage and off. See website for updated information. *richmondjazzandmusicfestival.com*

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CAROLINE VAIN

CAROLINEVAIN.COM

Indie rock and folk artist Caroline Vain channels her musical influences in her debut self-titled EP, which dropped in February. Catch her during RVA Music Night, part of Friday Cheers at Brown's Island on May 23.

Richmond magazine: What are your favorite local music venues?
Caroline Vain: My favorite is probably Révéler. I really love the atmosphere. I love that people can drift in off Cary Street, so you end up getting more people at your shows than you might expect. It's definitely more of a listening room. It's really fun to play at The Camel and Get Tight Lounge. Depending on the type of music or the vibe, each venue has its own kind of selling point.

RM: Which concerts are you looking forward to experiencing this summer?
Vain: I'm excited to see Jason Isbell at the [Allianz] Amphitheater. He's a really loved artist by me, and I know Alison Krauss is set to perform at the amphitheater as well. So, it will just be cool to experience a new venue in that area of Richmond, which is so beautiful.

RM: What are your top spots for catching Richmond-based artists?
Vain: I think The Camel is a really iconic place to play for RVA musicians, and there's a lot of opportunity to grow your audience at that venue because of the way that they format shows. They'll usually have two or three artists on a bill, and you can meet other musicians that way, meet their audience and just kind of grow your following. And they do so many shows, so there's always an opportunity to get in somewhere [on their show calendar] and the atmosphere there has always been really welcoming and friendly.

RM: How would you describe the evolution of Richmond's music scene, and why should people check out upcoming shows?
Vain: I moved here close to two and a half years ago, so I've been trying to work my way up through the music scene. I saw a lot of the same names around the singer-songwriter scene, and I've made it a point to get to know those people and try and work with them. And it's been overwhelmingly a positive, friendly experience. There's a lot to explore across different genres. *–AC*

SWEET POTATOES

SWEETPOTATOESMUSIC.COM

With multiple members trained in classical music, this upbeat jazz combo founded by guitarist Johnny Hargrove blends musicianship with fresh style. The group has several upcoming gigs, including the Fan Arts Stroll May 16 and Stone Brewing June 14.

Richmond magazine: What are your favorite local things to do during summer?
Johnny Hargrove: Richmond is a really good city for not even just music but DIY stuff in general. I really like the fact that everyone has their own little niche that they're doing. Summer is when you really get to see a lot of that, because it ends up in the sidewalks [or] the streets.

RM: Are there any venues that are great for pushing artists outside their comfort zone?
Hargrove: One of my favorite venues is Révéler, not even just because of the aesthetic. I've seen such a vast variety of music there. The chaos of the organized randomness of the inside really helps it fit every kind of act that they have.

RM: What is on the horizon for Sweet Potatoes?
Hargrove: We are playing some cool shows, and I'm excited about Riverrock being one of them. We've got a big First Friday at Gallery5 that we're stoked about. But for me, I want to write some stuff. I'm feeling that mood this year, so that's what I think I'm going to focus on. *–DJ*

BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY CAROLINE VAIN; ABOVE LEFT: TOM TOPINKA/COURTESY SWEET POTATOES

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INTER ARMA

INTERARMAMUSIC.COM

Over its 19-year history, extreme metal band Inter Arma — Latin for "In Times of War" — has played nearly a thousand shows in the U.S., Europe and Brazil. They'll perform at The Canal Club on June 19. Longtime vocalist Mike Paparo reflects on the band's Richmond roots and the local scene.

Richmond magazine: What are your favorite local music venues?
Mike Paparo: We don't play Richmond quite as much as we used to anymore. I'm from a DIY punk metal background, so if I am going to see a show, my favorite place is The Warehouse. Cobra Cabana is cool, too. If you want to see a national band, you don't have a lot of choices. I go to The National but ... the smaller venues are the places I enjoy seeing bands the most.

RM: Which concerts are you looking forward to experiencing this summer?
Paparo: Mournful Congregation from Australia is coming to The Camel in May. Every year there is a huge metal music festival on Memorial Day weekend in Baltimore. There will be a lot of Richmond shows of the touring bands that come to that.

RM: How would you describe the evolution of Richmond's music scene?
Paparo: Everything is cyclical. There was a lull and now there are a million young punk bands, house shows and DIY stuff. I'm happy that scene is still vital, even though now I am 41 and feel like a dinosaur. *–PM*

Richmond noisegrind band Suppression performs at Cobra Cabana during spring 2025. The venue has a tented back patio for outdoor shows.

SEASONAL CONCERTS

5/18 The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen presents the Antique Melody Show during their Center Field Outdoor Concert season. A mix of old-time swing and cabaret sounds, the group plays nostalgic hits from the 1920s-40s with some modern twists performed in the classic jazz style. 3 p.m. $20. *artsglenallen.com*

6/5 After a four-year hiatus, Servpro After Hours Concerts at the Innsbrook Pavilion returns to its original location at 4901 Lake Brook Drive in Glen Allen. The summer programming includes Tribute Thursdays, kicking off with Elton John and Billy Joel tribute band Face 2 Face. 6 p.m. Tickets start at $20. *afterhoursinnsbrook.com*

6/5 Prabir Mehta plays plays solo at Brambly Park in Scott's Addition. 6 to 8:30 p.m. Admission is free. *bramblypark.com*

6/18 Singer-songwriter Aimee Mann attended Midlothian High School before studying at the Berklee College of Music and achieving international acclaim for hits like "Save Me." She'll stop by The National alongside Jonathan Coulton. 7:30 p.m. Tickets start at $33 (VIP packages are available). *thenationalva.com*

7/11 Grammy-winning singer and former Hootie & the Blowfish frontman Darius Rucker performs at Atlantic Union Bank After Hours in Doswell. 7 p.m. Tickets start at $36. *afterhoursconcertseries.com*

8/1 The Head and the Heart may be based in Seattle, but the heartwarming rock band's Richmond connections run deep. Expect a hometown atmosphere when the group stops by the Allianz Amphitheater at Riverfront. 7 p.m. Tickets start at $40 (VIP packages are available). *allianzamphitheater.com*

ABOVE RIGHT: COURTESY INTER ARMA; *BOTTOM RIGHT:* ASH DANIEL

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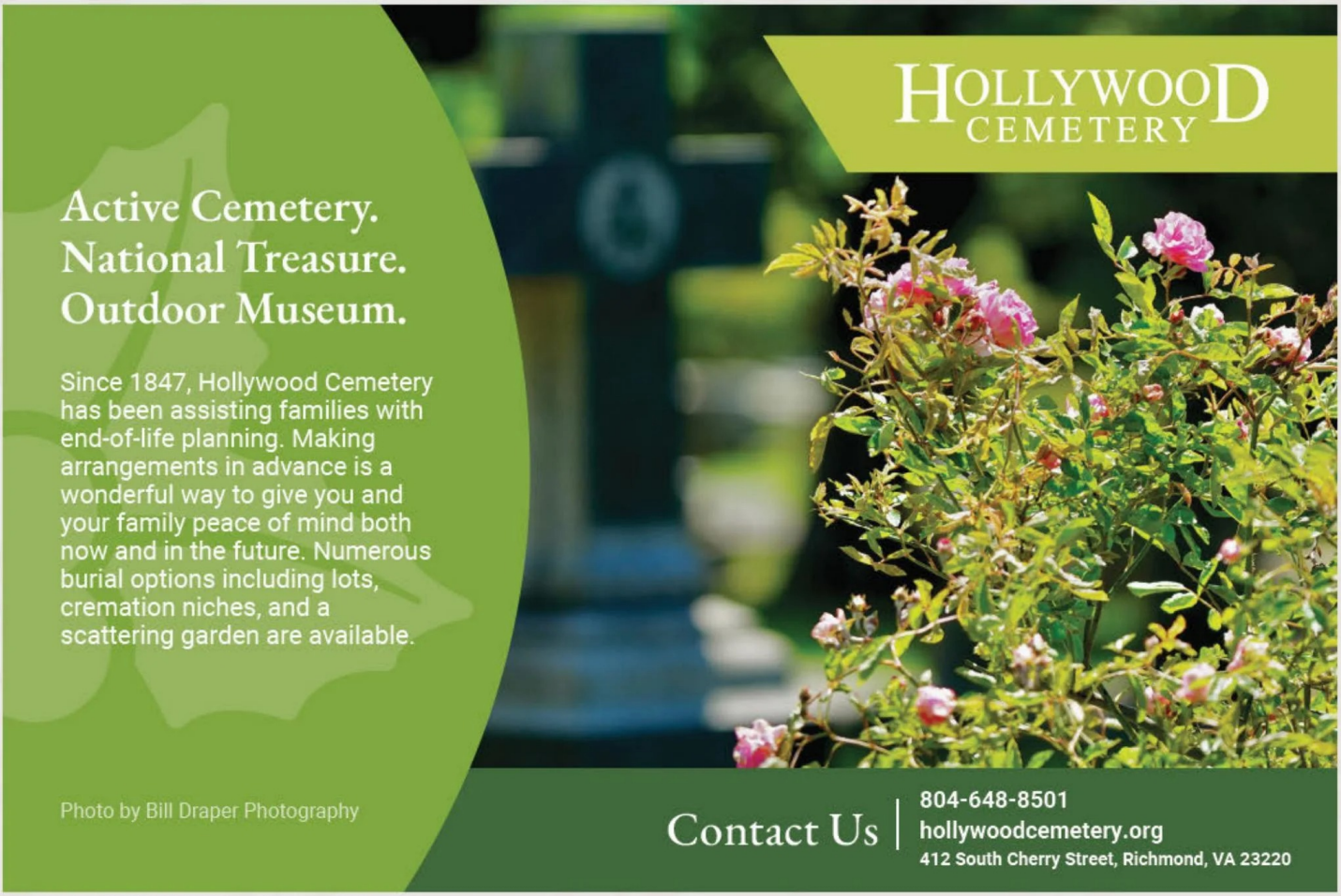

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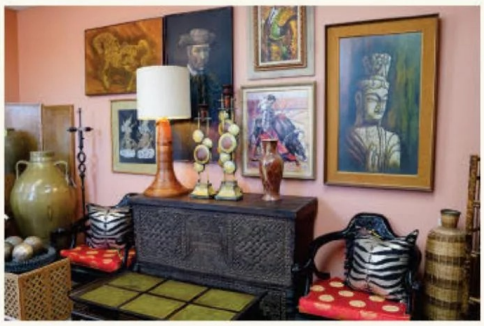

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Among the mountains, lakes, rivers and trails of Southwest Virginia rests the beautiful Pulaski County. Established in 1839, the 330 square miles are home to rich history and natural beauty that are prime for exploration and recreation, including two state parks. Together, Claytor Lake State Park and New River Trail State Park offer something to interest all outdoor enthusiasts, from watersports and fishing to hiking and biking.

While Pulaski County is a great hub for outdoor activity, there are many opportunities to relish local culture and heritage. Escape for a day and savor local wines at one of the three county wineries. Encounter historic Draper or explore the local museums and art centers. Enjoy a game at historic Calfee Park — one of the oldest minor league baseball parks in the United States. However you choose to immerse yourself, there will be much to discover in Pulaski County.

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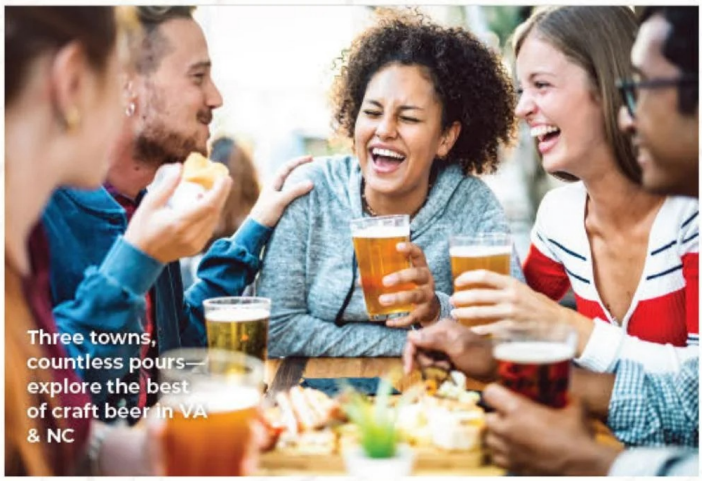
Summertime in Richmond means lively festivals, sunny strolls through historic neighborhoods and riverside adventures along the James. At Linden Row Inn, you're perfectly positioned to enjoy it all. This hidden gem, located in the heart of Virginia's capital, blends 19th-century elegance with modern comforts. Spend your days exploring downtown's vibrant arts scene, al fresco dining spots and charming cobblestone streets, then retreat to a guest room adorned with historic charm and timeless furnishings. Whether you're a history buff, foodie or art lover, Richmond in the summer offers a dynamic and memorable escape. LINDENROWINN.COM

EXPERIENCE SUMMER BLISS IN VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE AT THE LIBERTY TRUST

Summer is the perfect time to discover Roanoke, a lively city nestled in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. Stay at The Liberty Trust, a stunning boutique hotel located in a historic bank building in downtown. Known as one of the top mountain biking destinations on the East Coast, Roanoke offers miles of scenic singletrack and beginner-friendly greenways that are perfect for riders of all skill levels. After a day of adventure — whether you're biking, hiking or cruising the Blue Ridge Parkway — unwind with a globally inspired meal at The Vault at The Liberty Trust, the hotel's one-of-a-kind lobby restaurant and bar. With live music, craft breweries and cultural attractions just steps away, Roanoke delivers the ultimate summer mix of adrenaline and relaxation. LIBERTYTRUSTHOTEL.COM



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From Roanoke to Blowing Rock, discover the magic of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

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SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

OUR STORY

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Mexico Restaurant opened their first location in Richmond, Virginia in 1990. Since then, they have grown to have six locations in greater Richmond. They have built their reputation as a family business that provides fresh, Mexican food in a festive and friendly atmosphere.

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2024 VOTED BEST Richmond Magazine

The Best Richmond Times-Dispatch

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EAT & DRINK

The Jasper's bar manager Brittany Jones puts the finishing touches on her signature cocktails Paloma Anderson *(left)* and Spring Training

FRED TURKO

Food-fueled getaways and activities P. 104

A Southern comfort staple P. 106

20 years of Blanchard's P. 108

Brittany Jones of The Jasper P. 110

Go green with matcha P. 112

VA bartenders compete in a national competition P. 114

Edited by EILEEN MELLON

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IN-DEPTH

ROAM IF YOU WANT TO

Delicious day trip destinations

By Stephanie Ganz and Eileen Mellon

From top: Inside the Warm Springs Pools; Foodlore Fridays

1 WARM SPRINGS
Foodlore Provisions at Troddenvale → Warm Spring Pools

Nestled in the Allegheny Highlands, Troddenvale is committed to producing niche ciders. In 2017, owners and spouses Will and Cornelia Hodges introduced Foodlore Provisions, an online marketplace offering a taste of the region with pickups on the farm. Those Friday pickups eventually evolved into parties, and now the Hodges call on their cadre of friends and chefs to prepare food for guests from an Airstream trailer on the farm. If you've made the trek to Warm Springs, a dunk in the springs themselves is essential. The crystal pools have soothed many travelers with their clear, mineral-rich, 98-degree waters dating back 9,000 years. Reservations for pools required. —*SG*

WARM SPRINGS

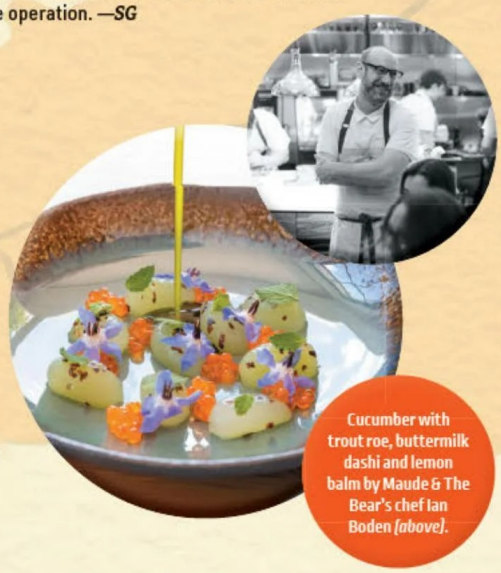
From top: Asparagus salad with wild nettle cream and locust blossoms; Chef Dan Gleason

2 SPERRYVILLE
Old Rag Mountain → Sumac

Intrepid hikers are rewarded with breathtaking panoramas of the Blue Ridge Mountains atop Old Rag, a 3,284-foot peak in Madison County. One of the best hiking trails in the South, the 9-mile roundtrip adventure features an exhilarating boulder hop section that leads to pristine valley views. Secure a park pass and day-use ticket in advance. After, mosey over to Sumac in nearby Sperryville. The Friday-Sunday pop-up (reservations needed for the tasting menu) housed at Pen Druid Brewing earned a spot on The New York Times' Restaurant List in 2024. There, chef Dan Gleason leads a small and ambitious team from a converted Airstream trailer, producing elevated, wildly seasonal dishes bearing the smoke of the wood hearth that anchors the operation. —*SG*

3 STAUNTON
Maude & The Bear → Staunton Farmers Market

Whether you reserve a table for the tasting menu or book a room in this reimagined 1926 Montgomery Ward kit house, a trip to the James Beard Award-nominated inn and restaurant Maude & The Bear will be a highlight on any summer itinerary. Owner Ian Boden pays special homage to his family's Jewish and Appalachian roots in meticulously prepared, surprising plates (the multicourse breakfast menu is exclusive to guests of the inn). Five minutes down the road, the Saturday-only Staunton Farmers Market is a pedestrian paradise of producer-only small farms, bakers and artisans. Start with a perfectly spiced cup from Chai Dhaba before strolling the rows of vendors, including dairy darlings Ballerino Creamery and Ukrainian bakery Razumova. —*SG*



Cucumber with trout roe, buttermilk dashi and lemon balm by Maude & The Bear's chef Ian Boden *(above)*.

FROM TOP: GORDON GREGORY; ERIN COWDEN; COURTESY SUMAC; BRIAN OH; STEPHANIE WHITEHILL; IAN BODEN

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Julia Child's kitchen and book collection on display at the National Museum of American History

4 WASHINGTON, D.C.
Julia Child's Kitchen → Union Market

Few culinary pilgrimages are holier than going to the National Museum of American History to behold Julia Child's painstakingly preserved Cambridge, Massachusetts kitchen. The taller than average marble counters, massive six-burner Garland range and iconic pegboard wall lined with pots and pans will appeal to those who dream of baking fluffy souffles or braising fork-tender coq au vin. Following a morning at the museum, make your way to Union Market for a dense selection of dining options and snag a shakshuka croissant from the Bib Gourmand-designated Levantine bakery Yellow. For a slower pace, head to Kwame Onwuachi's Afro-Caribbean Dōgon, experience Vietnamese fine dining at Moon Rabbit or enjoy Ethiopian specialties at Family Ethiopian. —*SG*

WASHINGTON, D.C.

SPERRYVILLE

STAUNTON

CHARLOTTESVILLE

5 KINSALE
The Slips → Lucky's

Situated in the Northern Neck, Kinsale screams small-town summer. Make stops for local delights at family-owned Garner's Produce, crispy fried chicken at gas station gem Jack Rabbit Express and rosé at Hague Winery. The season is supremely dialed in at The Slips, a private marina accessed via membership to the Yeocomico Club ($50 a year per person or $120 for families), which also hosts public community events including the Waterman Markets. There you'll discover Lucky's. The tiny dockside bar led by Richmond residents, industry vets and spouses Katy Best and Josh Dziegiel, serves up snacks and sips including tropical drinks, orange crushes, mojitos, tacos, sandwiches and local oysters. Pro tip: Grab picnic supplies and hop in a kayak. —*EM*

KINSALE

RICHMOND

From left: Fig and nectarine frangipane galette; Rachel DeJong holds a seasonal chocolate hazelnut tart

The Utah from Yorkie's, with turkey and roasted peppers on focaccia

6 CHARLOTTESVILLE
Cou Cou Rachou → Birdhouse

Led by Rachel DeJong, this French bakery is a paean to pastry, producing delicate, flaky croissants, custardy canelés and a selection of seasonal treats with local ingredients. Come summer, you'll find sour cherries making their bold return in tarts, swirls and soft serve sundaes. "We really do cherish our local seasonal fruits," DeJong says. Next, stomp the brick-paved streets of the Downtown Mall and make your way to Birdhouse, a nook of a restaurant where brined, rotisserie-cooked chicken is the centerpiece of any meal. The Rancho Gordo Marcella beans with garlic and a hint of chile and breadcrumb-topped baked fennel nearly steal the show. —*SG*

7 VIRGINIA BEACH
Yorkie's → Frank and Patty's

My favorite part of any beach trip is eating an Italian sub by the ocean, and I've found kindred spirits at Yorkie's, a from-scratch "modern deli" from chef Kip Poole. Their eponymous sub stacks four meats on a sesame-studded roll before getting swaddled in deli paper for easy toting. Grab napkins, you'll need them. A proper crispy-edged smashburger and an ice-cold martini await at Frank & Patty's, in Virginia Beach's trendy ViBe district. Go with a crew so you can sample the loaded Norfolk Snap Hotdog, the big honkin' wedge salad and a pile of crispy french fries. Expect to wait in line on the weekends; it's worth every second. —*SG*

VIRGINIA BEACH

FROM TOP: GETTYWIRESTOCK; COURTESY LUCKY'S; COURTESY YORKIE'S; CHIME STUDIO; COURTESY COU COU RACHOU

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Jane Dough's seeded mini boule

AROUND TOWN

BEST BITES

Dishes we can't stop dreaming about

SEEDED MINI BOULE

$6 at Jane Dough RVA, ***instagram.com/janedough_rva***

I'm a sucker for seedy bread, a crusty loaf where each bite offers different nutty notes and toasty textures. After recently discovering small-batch bread pop-up Jane Dough's version, I have been faithfully seeking it out. To unlock a simple joy, slather a slice with a smear of good butter and a dash of flaky salt. ***—Eileen Mellon***

LA PETITE MORT AU CHOCOLAT EN FLAMBÉ

$15 at L'Opossum,
626 China St.

We kept putting off a visit to L'Opossum, waiting for the ever-elusive "special occasion," but my wife's birthday provided reason for a surprise. After our sumptuous meal, we shared "La Petite Mort," a decadent dessert involving dark deliciousness and flames, named for the phrase describing, well, just look up "the little death." Yes, it's that good. ***—Harry Kollatz Jr.***

PUP CUP

$1.50 at Davvero Gelato,
6931 Lakeside Ave.

**Ordering tip for humans: Ask for the "fresh whipped cream."*

You might be familiar with this Lakeside joint's colorful rotation of naturally vegan gelatos and sorbets, but no cone is complete without the similarly dairy-free whipped cream. I entered a state of bliss upon sampling this pillowy, decadent, sweet-salty fluff, nearly finishing the entire cup before my dog's whimpering brought me back to reality. Sorry, Kiwi, next time I'll order two. ***—Ryan Rich***

EVENT PICKS

A tabbouleh-tinged Richmond ritual, the **LEBANESE FOOD FESTIVAL** returns May 16-18 to St. Anthony Maronite Church. The event, celebrating 40 years in 2025, is a feast for all ages.

Food is the focus at the 27th annual **ASIAN AMERICAN CELEBRATION**. With the theme "Taste of Asia," the event, set for May 17 at the Greater Richmond Convention Center, showcases the cuisine and culture of 15 different Asian American communities.

REMEMBER THAT PLACE?

Family Secrets

Reggie Littleton

SINCE 2002, REGGIE LITTLETON has been feeding Richmonders from his Southern food staple Family Secrets like, well, family. "I always wanted to start a Black-owned neighborhood restaurant. Everyday cooking where you could go to a place and eat home-cooked meals."

Those signature dishes include jumbo chicken wings, wood-smoked North Carolina barbecue (Littleton grew up spending summers at a family farm in Rocky Mount) and, according to the proprietor, the most pigs' feet sold on the East Coast. "That's truly a southern staple," Littleton says. "Back in the day, especially in slavery, the slave masters only gave the Black slaves scraps. It was the feet, the head, the tail; they ate the tenderloins and the ribs and all that stuff. So, it made something out of nothing."

Since opening, Littleton has stayed focused on the community. "I work with ex-convicts, non-violent, non-sex offenders; I'm giving them an opportunity and a chance." He also works to lift up the next generation of chefs, taking on apprentices from Richmond Technical Center's culinary arts program.

Originally located on North Avenue, followed by a move to Brookland Park Boulevard, Family Secrets is currently at 5310 Chamberlayne Ave., its largest space to date. Littleton says he wants folks to feel at home coming to Family Secrets. The name is a nod to the notion that, as he sees it, "Everybody has some secret family recipe, some staple. You can come here once or twice a week and don't break the bank. And its comfort." ***—Matthew Sporn***

Hot and new can steal the spotlight, but what about longstanding local favorites? Each month, we'll visit a Richmond-area restaurant that has been in business 15 years or longer.

FROM TOP: EILEEN MELLON; STEPHANIE GANZ; JAY PAUL

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SPOTLIGHT

DAVID BLANCHARD

The founder of multilocation coffee shop and roaster Blanchard's celebrates 20 years of beans

By Eileen Mellon

804 ALL DAY
"I've lived in Richmond my entire life. I went to Freeman High School and **University of Richmond**. I was born at St. Mary's Hospital, and both of my kids were, as well."

EARLY BEGINNINGS
"We started in January 2005. Three months in, we got an opportunity to sell coffee at Joe's Market, a Ukrop's specialty market. They set us on a path of selling wholesale coffee in grocery stores. We started taking online sales seriously about 10 years ago, and we opened **our first cafe** in October 2019."

CUP OF CHOICE
"I make coffee on a **Moccamaster** every morning. At the cafe, I usually order our seasonal drinks, and my daily order is an iced coffee. My favorite mug is a cheap ceramic one from the Grand Canyon."

RVA FAVORITES
"We live near the trail system, so I love running or hiking the trails around the river. They are truly a gem of the city. **Kuba Kuba** is my go-to. I have known Manny [Mendez, the owner] for a long time, and there is nowhere else I would rather be."

BREWS CRUISE
"I am currently on a quest to get a coffee in **every state** this year. Stay tuned for my favorite."

SERIOUS SWIFTIE
"If I'm in control of the tunes, people will hear **Taylor Swift** coming through the speakers. I am a girl dad, and in many ways, Taylor Swift has been the soundtrack for the last decade of my life."

ILLUSTRATION BY ABIGAIL GIUSEPPE. *CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:* JUSTIN VAUGHAN; GETTY/SHIRONOSOV; RYAN RICH (BRACELET BY SADIESMOON ON ETSY); COURTESY BLANCHARD'S

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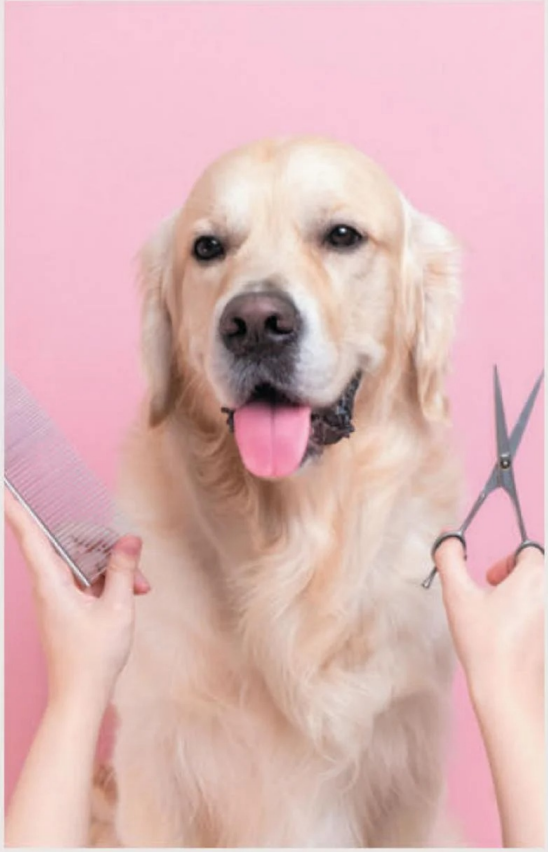
May Is...



NATIONAL PET MONTH

Dogma

With over 50 years of dedicated service, Dogma Grooming and Pet Needs takes pride in being one of the original pet grooming establishments in Carytown. At Dogma, we believe in what's best for your pet. That dedication extends from our top-notch grooming services to our holistic and sustainable nutrition, as well as pet wellness products. With flea and tick season rapidly approaching, we are proud to highlight Wondercide! Established in 2009 and later seen on "Shark Tank," Wondercide is a plant-powered, eco-friendly, holistic approach to pest prevention. After her companion Luna became sick from conventional flea and tick prevention, founder Stephanie Boone discovered that no natural solutions or preventatives existed on the market, and she spent the next few years developing the solution. Dogma Grooming and Pet Needs proudly carries the whole line of products including topical sprays for the pet and home, collars, and lawn and garden treatments. **dogmagrooming.com**

Holiday Barn

When you choose Holiday Barn Pet Resorts for dog or cat board-ing, you can relax knowing that your pet is in good hands. Luxurious accommodations, friendly service and fun activities will have you wondering if your pet's vacation will be better than your own! Our dog trainers are ready to help you and your dog achieve a new level of trust and understanding, and our full-service grooming shops offer style, comfort and a customized approach based on your dog's coat. Our popular dog day care program embraces the most up-to-date safety protocols in the industry to help ensure that dogs have fun with their friends. **holidaybarn.com**

NATIONAL STRAWBERRY MONTH

Agriberry Farm

Richmond's own Agriberry Farm grows the most delicious, nutritious strawberries in the RVA area. You can find our famous strawberries at most weekend farmers markets through the end of June — look for us under the purple tent. Need more than just weekend berries? Join our all-fruit CSA to get special access to all our fruit offerings for 13 or 26 weeks! Visit **agriberry.csaware.com** for share options and pickup locations.

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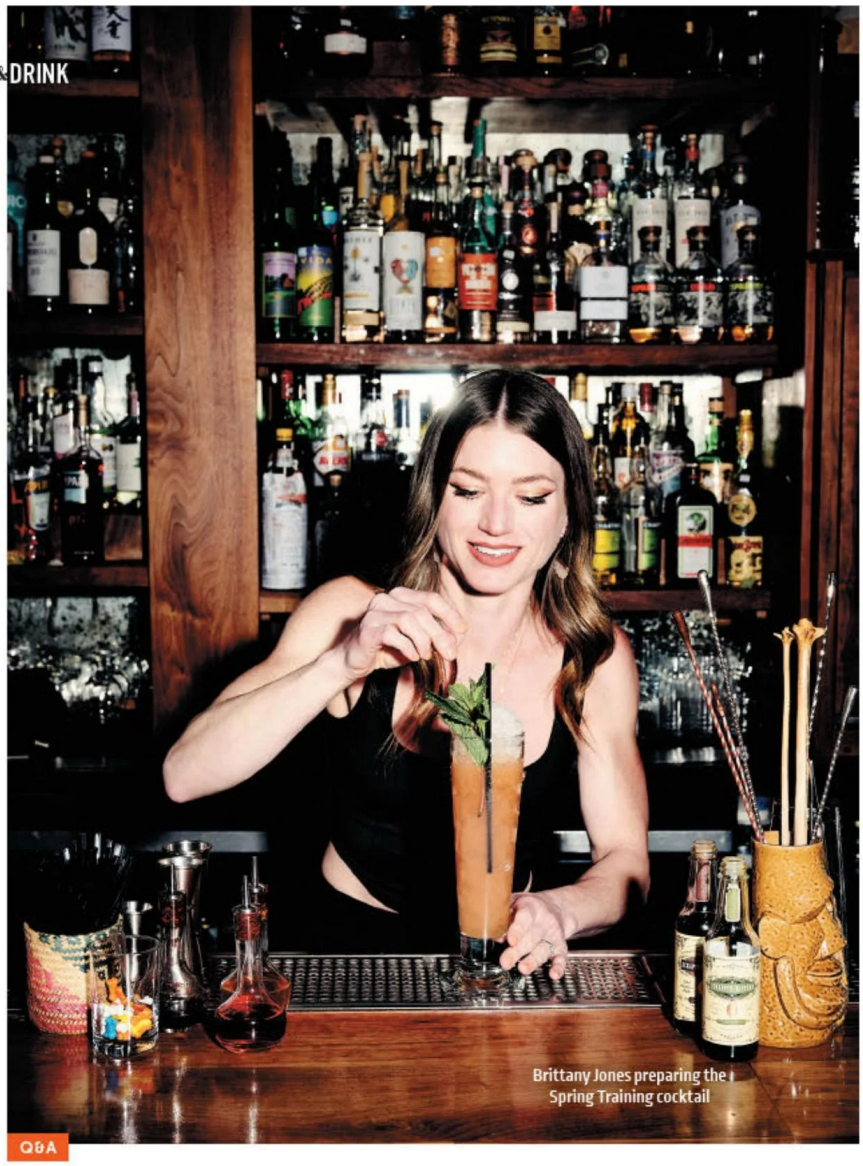

Brittany Jones preparing the Spring Training cocktail

Q&A

PONY CLUB

The Jasper's bar manager is a force behind the well

By Bird Cox

You'll see the word 'lucky' pop up a few times as Brittany Jones, bar manager of The Jasper, reflects upon her decades in the industry — but that's her humility talking. Helming the instrumental Carytown cocktail bar since 2020, the whiskey lover's efforts and creative thinking are elevating the already-high standards set there. Jones also operates the mobile bar business One For The Road with her husband, possesses a playful spirit (peep the doggie-bone-adorned Spring Training cocktail) and crafts handsewn bandanas for pups.

Richmond magazine: Tell us about your bar and drink-making background.

Brittany Jones: I was a graphic design major at JMU and upon graduation realized that I didn't want to be stuck behind a computer. While I figured life out, I thought I would bartend. Since 2009, I have bartended at [places ranging from] high volume clubs to food-focused restaurants to intimate cocktail bars. The job that really put me on the path to a career in this industry was Lucky in Roanoke. They gave me an opportunity to learn and grow and pushed me to apply for programs within the bar world.

During my time there, I was able to attend Camp Runamok in Kentucky to dive into bourbon; Cane Camp, in Puerto Rico to learn about rum and culture; [and] Portland Cocktail Week in Oregon to gain knowledge through educational classes and be a part of Bacardi Bar Build, where we created a bar concept and built it in a day. I also had the opportunity to go to both [headquarters for] Patrón and Herradura in Mexico to see the process of tequila-making. All the experiences I've had in the bar world led me to securing a job at the best cocktail bar in Richmond.

> **"All the experiences I've had in the bar world led me to securing a job at the best cocktail bar in Richmond."**
>
> *—Brittany Jones, The Jasper*

RM: When did you start with The Jasper, and how has your role there evolved?

Jones: After the pandemic, I saw that The Jasper was gearing up to reopen its doors. I thought there would be no chance to snag one of those coveted spots behind that bar but sent my resume over. Fast-forward to today, and I still feel lucky to have one of these coveted spots. Last year, I was given the opportunity to grow into the role of bar manager.

RM: How do you keep your team happy and engaged in creating new drinks?

Jones: I am very fortunate; our staff constantly has creativity coursing through their veins. Often, we are all chomping at the bit to start working on a new menu as soon as we drop one. To help scratch that itch this year, we are working on some creative and a bit over-the-top, limited time cocktail pop-ups–so keep an eye on our social media this year as we dive into some wild concepts.

RM: How do you combat burnout or fatigue and always being "on"?

Jones: Having other passions and interests and actively engaging in them is integral. Every day I make time for myself. Typically, this comes in the form of a workout, which keeps my brain in a positive headspace. I get so much social stimulation from bartending shifts that it's like pulling teeth to get me out on a night off. You will most likely find me at home, hanging out with my husband, Ryan, who is my favorite person in the world, and my two wild dogs, Rowdy and Oakland.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

FRED TURKO

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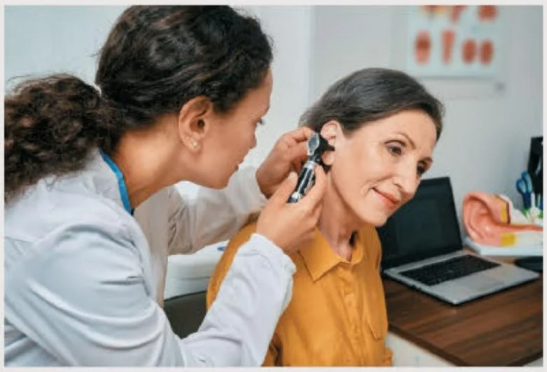
May Is...

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH

The Byrd Theatre

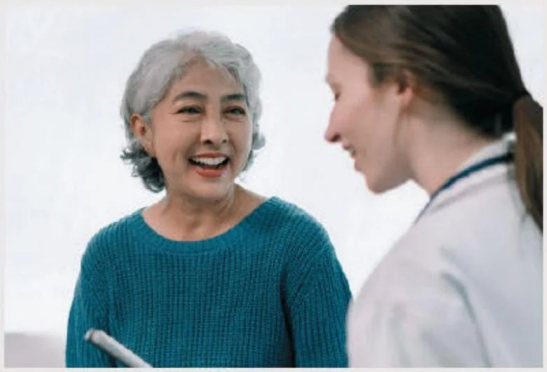
The Byrd Theatre Foundation, owner and operator of the Byrd Theatre, is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. The Theatre was built in 1928 and has been in almost continuous operation as a movie theater since then; today, we primarily screen older films with some second-run movies thrown in the mix. Our movie schedule is Wednesday through Sunday at 7 p.m., as well as family-friendly screenings on Saturdays at 10 a.m. and classic movies, typically pre-1970s, on Sundays at 2 p.m. We also host private events, including birthday parties, corporate events, film festivals, weddings and gaming parties, throughout the week but usually on Monday and Tuesday evenings and Saturday afternoons. To see our movie schedule and to submit a rental request, please visit our website at **byrdtheatre.org**.



NATIONAL SPEECH-LANGUAGE-HEARING MONTH

Richmond ENT

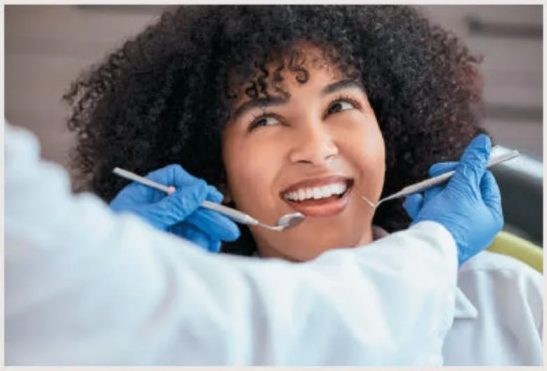
Struggling to hear clearly? Richmond Hearing Aids, in partnership with Richmond ENT, offers expert solutions tailored to your needs. With an otolaryngologist diagnosing your hearing loss, you'll receive accurate, medical-based care — not just a quick fix. Richmond Hearing Aids provides the latest technology with compassionate, personalized service. Discover the difference that comes from expert evaluation and advanced hearing solutions. Visit **RichmondENT.com** today and start your journey to better hearing with a team you can trust.



NATIONAL BLADDER CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Virginia Urology

Bladder cancer affects anyone at any age; however, most people affected by it are over 50. Signs and symptoms may include blood in urine, painful urination, back pain or chronic UTIs. The main risk factors are smoking and other tobacco use, chronic bladder inflammation, exposure to chemicals (especially at work), and being male. People without these risk factors have also been diagnosed, so when in doubt, get checked. Virginia Urology has been diagnosing and treating bladder cancer since 1928. We offer patients the latest in diagnostics and treatments in our offices or ambulatory surgery center. For more information, call **804-330-9105** or visit **uro.com**.



NATIONAL DENTAL CARE MONTH

Virginia Family Dentistry

Celebrating over 50 years in business, Virginia Family Dentistry has served the Richmond area since 1974. Our doctor-owned practice spans 17 locations with over 70 general dentists and specialists, including orthodontists, periodontists, prosthodontists, endodontists and pediatric dentists. We provide comprehensive care for lifelong patients, and with a dedicated team of over 450 dental professionals and staff, we proudly serve generations of families across Central Virginia. Our commitment to excellence and personalized care remains as strong as ever. Discover the difference 50 years of trusted service makes by visiting **vadentist.com**.

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5 FAVES

MATCHA MADNESS

Finely ground Japanese green tea plays a starring role in drinks, desserts and cocktails *By Genevelyn Steele*

1 Matcha and white chocolate ice cream

$5 at Scoop

An earthy creaminess sweeps across your tongue as shavings of white chocolate tease sweetness into this balanced scoop. The pop of caffeine in your dessert is delivered via matcha, tempered by its L-theanine content, an amino acid that quells the highs and lows of caffeine with calm mental focus. Make it a double!

2 Matcha bubble egg waffle

$6.25 at Boba Tea & Snow Ice House

Boba Tea & Snow Ice House's matcha-nuanced bubble waffles are Asian in style, meaning less treacly than an American version, so stuffing one with ripe berries feels both indulgent and healthy at the same time. Choose from an extensive list of fillings for the thick, eggy bubble waffle, such as boba, nuts, whipped cream or fresh fruit. This portable snack is perfect for noshing while walking around Carytown.

3 Strawberry milk with matcha cap

$6.25 at Zen Cafe

This iced seasonal drink layers concentrated green tea powder – frothed to a thick, satiny, cold foam – with housemade strawberry milk to create a candy-like liquid treat. Looking for less sugar? Customize your level when ordering; 50% less sweet continues to hit saccharine notes in this Instagrammable sipper.

4 Matcha mochi doughnut

$2.99 at Oh Mochi

Oh Mochi's rice flour doughnuts boast a stretchy, gossamer pull much different than a traditional fry cake. The airy round promises more resistance and is painted with an antioxidant-rich matcha glaze. These palm-sized snacks have fluted edges, which are fun to pull apart nub by nub, breaking the mochi into mini doughnut holes.

5 Matcha daiquiri

$13 at Nightcrawler

The Nightcrawler cocktail pop-up has a permanent home at Cobra Burger the third Sunday of each month, but follow their Instagram for more opportunities to savor Chris Mumford and Alexyss Kaneubbe's matcha creations. This one combines rum with pineapple juice and matcha, shaking it until frothy before serving it straight. The delicate and potent sip is garnished with a matcha Pocky stick for good measure.

"It's Bo Time"

OPEN TAB

Trim The Fat A clever bar technique leads to bold flavors

Imparting taste and texture, fat-washing draws oil-soluble flavor compounds from a fat of choice into alcohol. After resting them together at room temperature, freeze the mixture and skim off the solidified fats. The result: booze with a softer texture that's imbued with newly developed salty, earthy, nutty or creamy notes. Animal fats, dairy butter and vegan nut butters can all be used.

Elijah's Ascension at JewFro
The Elijah's Ascension is a core drink on the JewFro menu. Their version of an Old Fashioned is kept versatile by rotating the fats they wash with Elijah Craig bourbon. They've used wagyu tallow, chicken schmalz and clarified butter; ask about the current version. Housemade cigar syrup lends a raisiny-leathery sweetness.

Kanpai Kanpai at Trouvaille
An audacious, delicious Japanese take on an Old Fashioned, this drink taps savory notes from its food components – miso butter-washed Toki whisky and sesame oil – instead of sweet, and it pays off. Plus, there's a deep, round saltiness from the addition of nori.

It's Bo Time at Verdant Lady
The winner of the fat-washing creativity competition is Verdant Lady, clocking in with a Bojangles biscuit concoction created by bartender Mel Rieg. Buttery vanilla icing, salty biscuit fat and blueberry filling wash through Cirrus vodka for a silky, fruity treat. The West End cocktail lounge amps up the blueberry flavor with a housemade syrup, adds to the drink's complexity with black walnut bitters and softens the edges with egg white. Too bad they're not open for breakfast. —*Bird Cox*

FROM TOP: JAY PAUL; COURTESY VERDANT LADY

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PURVEYOR

Envee Dressing

Envee Dressing founders Trey Creamer, Sophia Devlin, Grace Maclean and Lindsay Batten

HISTORY: In November, student-led business Envee Dressing was given the green light to launch its pesto-Caesar salad dressing. The product was chosen as the winner of the University of Richmond's annual Bench Top Innovations Great Bake Off, an entrepreneurial competition in its fourth year. After the event, all 16 seniors in the UR Robins' School of Business Bench Top Innovations course collectively began working together to bring Envee to market. The students learned how to develop food products throughout the course, and in March, Envee landed on local shelves.

SPECIALTY: Envee's sole offering is a creamy and tangy pesto-Caesar salad dressing. The nut-free condiment is "something completely new," says Kerin Debaney, head of public relations for the Bench Top Innovations program. "From what we know, it's the first pesto-Caesar salad dressing [on the market]."

PRODUCTION: The Envee team works with a plant in Chicago to make and ship the bottles to Richmond. They also worked with a food scientist to make sure the dressing is shelf stable.

BUY: Kramer's Market, Supper Club, Ellwood Thompson's, Libbie Market, UR Campus, and online at *enveedressings.com*.
—*Melody Yuan*

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INSIDER

GOLD STANDARD

Virginia bartenders head to a national stage for a prestigious cocktail competition

By Eileen Mellon

Steve Yang will return to the USBG World Class competition for the fourth year in a row this May.

When Steve Yang packs his car and heads to Atlanta for the United States Bartenders Guild World Class Competition this May, the bar director will be transporting his personal arsenal of house-made syrups, various cocktail mixers and hand-selected glassware. He was the first Virginia bartender to ever participate. Now, he's back for the fourth year in a row representing the state at one of the most respected cocktail competitions.

Yang, who devised the bar menu for Slack Tide Fish Co. and previously worked as the beverage director for Brenner Pass, Black Lodge, Metzger Bar & Butchery and Pink Room says, "It's the holy grail of cocktail competitions."

Clayton Bennett

Bringing together the best bartenders around the world, the 15-year-old global event is a high-intensity showcase of fine-tuned skills, expert speed and unmatched creativity. Every year, 50 countries hold their own World Class program, and the champions from each gather in a global mix-off. The destination for the 2025 finals is Shanghai.

And while New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and New Orleans may be the expected hot spots for the nation's best in bar, at this year's competition, Virginia takes the title of most-represented state. Competing with Yang is Jon Schott, a D.C.-based bartender responsible for creating the cocktail menu for the forthcoming Cirrus Vodka tasting room, and Clayton Bennett, a barback from The Glass Light Hotel in Norfolk.

The event is not simply a gathering of highball slingers and pint pourers; leading up to the competition there are cocktail submissions, explanatory essays and plenty of prepping, polishing and practice. Given the parameters in advance, the trio have been recipe testing, fine-tuning and texting (there's an active group chat with the 30 finalists) for the past six months.

Jon Schott

Likening the experience to rehearsing for a play, Yang says, "You cannot go into World Class without practicing. You're not competing against people; you're only competing against yourself and how much work you're willing to put in ahead of time to challenge yourself."

The competition will test their wit behind the well through a series of timed and judged challenges. A food pairing portion will task them with creating a cocktail using Bulleit bourbon and pairing it with a Southern dish. The "Mercado Mix-off" requires them to make two drinks using items traditionally found in a Latin market while relying on Don Julio Cristalino. The final segment, and by far the most arduous, is the speed round. Participants will present a bar concept that they've created and produce six ›

FROM TOP: SHANNON STURGIS; COURTESY CLAYTON BENNETT; COURTESY JON SCHOTT

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GOLD STANDARD | CONT'D FROM P. 114

seamless sips in eight minutes. Exuding the "Top Chef" anxiety of a ticking clock, participation is simultaneously stressful and satisfying, full of risks in hopes of high reward.

Schott, who is competing for the first time, says of R&D, "I know how much work I'm going to put into something like this to get here, so I know everyone else is there, too. I know they're working possibly multiple jobs right now and doing this thing, which is sort of like a side job. It's impressive."

For bartenders, the competition allows them to tap into their own style and be unbound by the parameters of a restaurant's persona. Yang plans to explore how ingredients travel the Silk Road and utilize items like apples, stone fruit and spices. Schott is doing a comic book-themed pop-up called Alter Ego, leaning into the idea that drinks have superpowers and the potential to be transformed.

Steve Yang at the 2024 USBG World Class competition

SHANNON STURGIS

Among the serious stakes of earning the top spot is a strong sense of camaraderie. "We all come out of World Class with, like, this weird trauma bond," Yang says with a laugh.

Providing a platform for professional bartenders to collectively push the boundaries of where a cocktail can go, World Class also supports mentorship, educational training and has organically established a network of industry movers and shakers. While all finalists, and specifically multi-time competitors like Yang, hope to win their way to Shanghai, participating presents as many opportunities as winning.

Schott says of the process, "There's a lot of growth and leaps and bounds in it. And I think the community aspect of it is sort of unreal."

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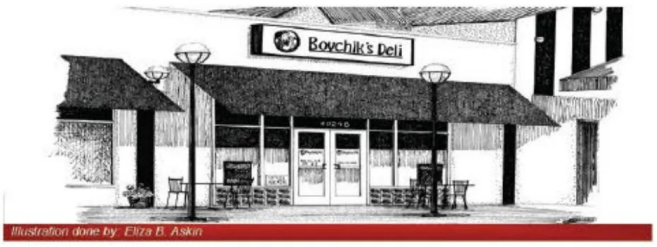

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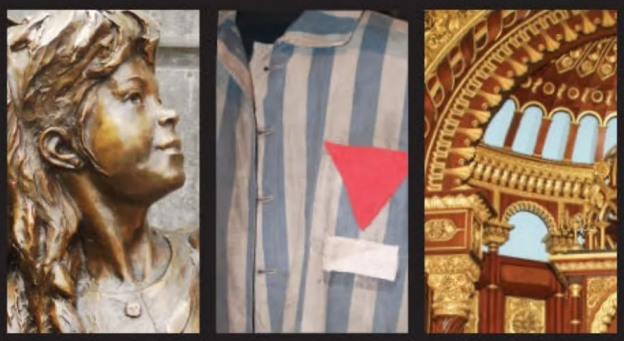

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PARTING SHOT

JAY PAUL

THE LEIGH STREET ARMORY, the only armory built in 19th-century America for a Black militia, disappeared from the Virginia National Guard's website in March after a federal purge of so-called DEI topics. On April 2, the militia was resurrected through a series of images projected onto the building, which is now the home of the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia.

The demonstration, which also celebrated the 160th anniversary of Richmond's emancipation by Union forces, was done by the collaborative nonprofit public art project Reclaiming the Monument, which in 2020 projected images of George Floyd and others onto the Robert E. Lee Monument. Pictures of soldiers who served and passed through the armory were joined by two phrases: "resist historical neglect" and "defend historical truth."

The pair behind the projection, Alex Criqui and Dustin Klein, credit Councilmember Katherine Jordan with planting the seed for this event following the deletion of an article on the armory and a photo gallery from the National Guard's website. The armory, built in 1895 thanks to the lobbying of Richmond Planet editor John Mitchell Jr., was used in the 20th century for various schools and other community purposes. In 2016, the BHMVA moved from Clay Street to the West Leigh Street building.

"We just want to support [the museum] and ... shine a light on the role that institution plays in our community and to make sure that history is not forgotten, even though people seem to be trying to marginalize it and devalue it at the federal level right now," Criqui says.

"It felt really beautiful out there," Klein says about the April 2 event. "It's nice to see people enthusiastic and happy to see these people blown up on the side of the building and getting respect that they deserve." —*Mark Newton*

See more photos taken around Richmond at ***instagram.com/richmondmag***.

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